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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Assisted by Ian Andrews

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Atlas in Action

While travelling the length and breadth of Scotland enlisting support and spreading the gospel about the New Atlas of Breeding Birds Jim Reid, the Scottish Organiser of the project, has been asked many questions about the methods to be used. Some of the more common queries are posed and answered below in the hope that the true simplicity of the fieldwork methods becomes more apparent.

Q. *Why have the categories of breeding used in the original breeding Atlas been discarded?*

A. This might seem to be the case when one looks at the recording sheets but actually they have not been discarded at all. Confirmation of breeding should still be made with recourse to the categories listed in the fieldwork instructions. An entry in the B column of the recording sheets and summary cards is all that is required to record a species as breeding. This not only cuts down on recording time but will also make data processing simpler.

Q. *I have received my fieldwork instructions with Scottish Bird News. Can I just go out and begin fieldwork now?*

A. Before you do any fieldwork you should contact your local Atlas representative/ organiser. His (or her!) address is on the back page of the Fieldwork Instructions. Recording sheets and summary cards are available only from him and it is essential that he knows where you are willing to do fieldwork in order that no area gets surveyed twice.

Q. *Which tetrads within a 10 km square should I survey?*

A. You have complete freedom of choice. You must, however, ensure that your local rep. knows which ones you intend to cover. He may also advise you which tetrads he would like surveyed.

Q. *How many tetrads within a 10 km square should be surveyed?*

A. A minimum of 8 tetrads should be surveyed.

Q. *Suppose there are fewer than 8 tetrads in a 10 km square which contain land?*

A. In this case all tetrads within that square should be surveyed - provided they meet the criteria of being surveyable.

Q. *What are these criteria?*

A. If the centre of a tetrad falls above the Low Water Mark or on fresh water it may be surveyed. If it falls below the Low Water Mark (ie. in the sea) it may not be surveyed irrespective of the amount of land it contains. The centres of tetrads are the intersections of the odd numbered lines on Ordnance Survey maps.

Q. *In order to achieve the minimum coverage of a 10 km square is it possible to do 4 tetrads this year and 4 next year?*

A. No. While the minimum coverage for a square in the survey is 8 tetrads the minimum coverage for a square in any single year is also 8 tetrads. This means if only the minimum amount of fieldwork is being done in a particular 10 km square (ie. 8 tetrads) it must be done in one season.

Jay *Andrew Dowell*

Q. *Suppose I want to contribute to the survey but can only afford the time to do 4 tetrads?*

A. This is perfectly acceptable provided your local rep. has ensured that at least another 4 tetrads in the square will be surveyed by someone else in the same year.

Q. *Should I spend more than 2 hours in a tetrad in order to get a complete species list for the tetrad?*

A. No. It is essential that only 2 hours survey work is carried out in a tetrad. In effect you will spend more than 2 hours in each tetrad because you will have to stop your watch while making counts of individuals (or nests) of those species which require to be counted. To reiterate, you should only do 2 hours actual surveying, excluding counting. A complete list of species for each tetrad is not required. The fact that some species will not be encountered in a particular tetrad (even although they are present) ensures the recording variability which is essential for estimating relative abundance.

Q. *May I split each 2 hour tetrad visit into several visits of shorter duration?*

A. Ideally you should make 2 visits of 1 hour each to each of your tetrads. One of these visits should be made in April or May and the other in June or July. However, in many 10 km squares in Scotland this will not be practical. These squares, generally, will be those most difficult to get surveyed either because they are in remote areas or because no fieldworkers live near them. In these squares one 2 hour survey visit will be acceptable and this should be done after mid-May. It is not acceptable to split your 2 hours surveying into anything other than two (one early and one late) 1 hour visits. For example, you my not make three 40 minute or four ½ hour visits.

Q. *Suppose I see species in tetrads outwith my timed visits to these tetrads?*

A. This may well happen. Survey work in tetrads will enable the relative abundance of species to be determined. Records of new species from times other than during the standardised 2 hour periods cannot be used in calculating species abundance. However, such records will be used in assessing species distribution so it is important that you record them not for the tetrad but for the 10 km square in which the tetrad lies.

Q. *What are key squares?*

A. Key squares are special squares which will be surveyed more intensively than ''normal squares''. Every one in nine 10 km squares in Scotland is a key square. In addition to being surveyed for the new Atlas they will also be surveyed as part of the Key Squares survey. Therefore they get surveyed twice. This means there will be two sets of data for key squares. These two data sets will be compared, so allowing any error or bias in Atlas fieldwork data to be identified. Fieldwork for the key squares survey will be done largely by local Atlas reps. and others delegated by them. The majority of fieldworkers, therefore, need not worry about them.

Remember to liaise closely with your local rep. and contact him if you have any queries. In addition Jim Reid will be available for consultation at 21 Regent Terrace, fieldwork duties permitting.

A backward step on Islay

As *SBN* readers will know the Greenland White-fronted Goose is one of the rarest wildfowl in the world, with a population of c21,000 of which roughly a third winter on Islay. The birds have now been given total protection on their breeding grounds in Greenland and those geese that winter in Ireland also enjoy protection, albeit on a tenuous year to year basis. It is against this background that the decision of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to issue licences to some Islay farmers to shoot Whitefronts that were allegedly damaging grassland must be seen. DAFS appear to have hoped that shooting would be carried out to scare rather than kill; however one farmer shot 18 geese in a week to the embarrassment of a DAFS official who happened to be on Islay at the time.

At least some conservationists accept that Whitefronts on Islay can affect the grass on which the livestock industry depends though hard data seems to be lacking as most of the work on geese feeding ecology on Islay has been done on the more numerous Barnacle Geese. Barnacles are being encouraged to concentrate on refuge sites, including the RSPB Reserve at Gruinart, where £50,000 of fertilizer has been applied to create attractive goose grazing, and a series of SSSI's where goose damage can be compensated by NCC. Whitefronts tend to be scattered in smaller groups over wider areas but NCC and RSPB both point out that the new scaring scheme designed to move geese into the designated sites, using unemployed people under an MSC scheme, has never been given the chance to prove its worth.

It seems the licence conditions have since been tightened. In fairness to the Islay farmers not all argue that killing geese, especialy more than one or two from a flock, is as essential as some of their representatives claim. This is worth stressing since some of the media, including BBC TV's *Nature* programme which introduced the topic with the emotive question "which are more important, geese or people?", seem more interested in controversy that accurate reporting though one has to say that some professional conservationists badly need lessons in public relations and the social history of Scotland. If a fraction of the money that is poured into agricultural overproduction was sensibly applied the whole controversy could have been prevented. As members who attended the last SOC Conference will know NCC can't pay compensation on farms outwith SSSI's. Another option that could be tried is artificial feeding as the Wildfowl Trust have down south – perhaps using some of the EEC grain mountain?

Readers should also be aware that an estate on Islay is keen to start sport shooting for paying guests. There are, of course, other paying guests who don't want to kill birds and three SOC groups visited Islay this winter as well as many members travelling independently. By visiting the island and spending money you are demonstrating that wild birds can actually help the local economy – don't be afraid to point this out to the Scottish Office!

SdP

Greenland White-fronted Geese, Islay *Morley Hedley*

Merlin persistently attacking rabbits

On 31 October 1987 I saw a brown (female/juvenile) Merlin sitting on top of an earth bank, while three or four rabbits of all sizes fed nearby, at the end of a pasture field and conifer plantation in west Galloway. The Merlin flew up, hovered above a rabbit, swooped at it but the rabbit escaped into undergrowth. The Merlin landed on a fence post. Four minutes later the falcon flew low and fast for about 30 metres towards a rabbit and attempted to strike it but the rabbit dodged and ran away. The Merlin then landed on the ground. It flew up again swooping on another rabbit and striking at it, but the rabbit ran off followed by the Merlin, hovering and swooping close above it; the rabbit also escaped. Three minutes later the Merlin again flew from a fence post and swooped twice on a rabbit. Shortly afterwards the Merlin flew and landed 100+ metres away (a habitual hunting tactic) as all the rabbits had apparently gone underground. Eight minutes later some rabbits emerged and the Merlin flew fast and very low towards one. The rabbit ran ahead of the falcon which tried to strike it unsuccessfully. Soon afterwards the Merlin flew off.

In studies of the food of Merlins, principally in the breeding season, small birds figure predominantly in their diet. Larger mammals have included young rabbits as prey in summer. More study is needed on winter foods but it probably largely consists of small, open-country birds. Whether the Merlin was seriously attempting to catch a rabbit or was merely 'playing' is not known but, judging by the number of attempts it made, one must assume that they were serious attacks. I have, previously seen a brown Merlin, on 22 February 1987, "jump" down from a fence post landing on the grass below as a small rabbit dodged out below it. Although brown Merlins capture prey up to the size of Lapwings in winter, about the same weight as some juvenile rabbits, it is probable that adult rabbits would be too large and strong a prey species for them. It may be that they attempt to catch rabbits in winter more often than has been published in the literature.

R.C. Dickson

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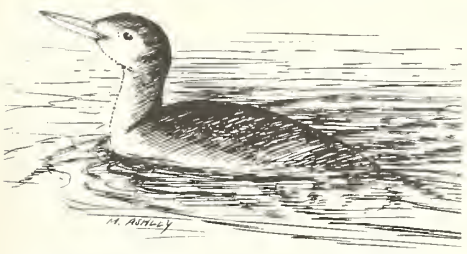
Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

Late winter remained mild and spring arrived early. Falls of migrants on the east coast and in the northern isles in late March included winter visitors, interrupted on their return to Scandinavia, and the first **Wheatears** and **Chiffchaffs**. Rare birds were few and far between, but included some real surprises.

Seventy-eight **Red-throated Divers** passed east off Chanonry Point on 15 January; 2 **Black-throated Divers** were in Shetland and c.14 in Orkney. The Whalsay **White-billed Diver** was seen for the 10th successive year, but more unusual was one off East Lothian in March. **Red-necked Grebes** in Gullane Bay peaked at 68 on 21 March. The Hermaness **Black-browed Albatross** which spent the preceding 17 summers in Shetland has not returned this year. Single **Sooty** and **Manx Shearwaters** were seen off Peterhead.



White-billed Diver *Mike Ashley*

A **Bewick's Swan** remained in Shetland in early January, when there was also a **Bean Goose**. Two **Snow Geese** wintered on Islay and 2 others were seen at Findhorn and Strathbeg. A **Ross's Goose** near the Ythan and a **Bar-headed Goose** near Stornoway were both of dubious origin, but a small **Canada Goose** on Islay is likely to have been Nearctic. Rare ducks included an **American Wigeon** on Loch Stiapavat in Lewis, 2 **King Eiders** in Shetland, with others at Embo, Inverallochy and Tayport and a **Surf Scoter** at Burgh Head, 3 in Gosford Bay and 5 others in Largo Bay. **Scaup** in the Cromarty Firth peaked at 242 in January when there were 1600 **Velvet Scoter** in St. Andrews Bay. The drake **Goldeneye X Smew** hybrid returned to the mouth of the River Ness, but **Smew** were scarce. A **Ruddy Duck** was on Kilconqhuar Loch in March.

A **Red Kite** was on Fair Isle on 26 March and another at Sumburgh the next day, with sightings throughout Shetland over the next 2 weeks. A **Whimbrel** was at Tyninghame on the exceptionally early date of 27 February and **Spotted Redshank** visited Orkney and the Beauly Firth.

The first **Great Skua** was reported back in Orkney on 26 March. Single **Little Gulls** were at Peterhead and Girdleness where there was also a **Mediterranean Gull**, with 2 others seen at Cramond. **Ring-billed Gulls** wintered in Orkney and on Islay. **Iceland Gulls** continued to be rather scarce, with 6 in Ullapool, 4 in Shetland and 4 in Inverness. The **Kumlien's Gull** again wintered at Banff. **Glaucous Gulls** were also few and far between. At least 1 **Sandwich Tern** wintered on the Forth, with the first returning birds in Orkney and off Peterhead on 25 March. There were still 92 **Little Auks** off Gullane on 26 January, but only a few reports elsewhere. **Stock Doves** are very scarce in the northern isles, so 1 in Shetland on 26 March and 3 on Fair Isle on 29 March were noteworthy.

Ring Ouzel *R.A. Richardson*

North Ronaldsay produced the first **Woodlark** in Orkney for 75 years and **Shore Larks** at Tyninghame numbered 6 in early March. A **Swallow** at Longniddry on 27 March was early, but nowhere near as unseasonal as an **Olive-backed Pipit** seen near Sumburgh on 3 January, only the second ever winter record in Britain. The weather allowed several **Robins** to winter in Shetland. There was a small arrival of **Black Redstarts** in late March, whilst at about the same time **Stonechats** occurred in larger than normal numbers. Early **Wheatears** included 1 in Glen Muick on 21 March, followed by 3 at St. Abbs on 26, when another was in Orkney, with 50 at Aberlady on 30th. A **Ring Ouzel** on Fair Isle on 16 March was the earliest there by 2 days.

Falls occurred between 21 and 28 March, mainly in the northern isles and on the east coast. The main birds involved were thrushes and finches, particularly **Blackbirds, Chaffinches** and **Bramblings**. Counts included 300 **Blackbirds** on North Ronaldsay on 23rd, 1300 on Fair Isle on 26th when there were also 350 **Fieldfares** and 150 **Redwings**. Wintering **Blackcaps** and **Chiffchaffs** occurred throughout the country, Aberdeen producing no less than 7 **Blackcaps**.

The first returning **Chiffchaff** was in East Lothian on 20 March. The northern **Treecreeper** wintered in Orkney, whilst in Shetland several migrant **Jackdaws** were recorded. More unusual finches included 3 **Hawfinches** on North Ronaldsay, with 10 at the Hirsel. **Lapland Buntings** were widespread on the east coast. **Snow Buntings** were relatively scarce on the coast, but 250 in the Lammermuirs were unusual. The highest count was 1000 at Corgarth, Grampian. A single **Yellowhammer** was on Out Skerries on 28th March.

Stop Press

Little Egret and Crane in Shetland in early April. ***Pete Ellis***

Lapland Bunting *Mike Ashley*

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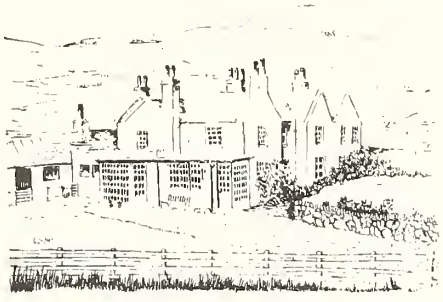

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Bird breakfasts

I have been doing the B.T.O. Garden Bird Feeding Survey since it started 18 years ago in three different gardens, and latterly the new BASF survey. One December afternoon last year I had a telephone call: would I take part in a new Food Preference survey? This would only last three weeks and involve one hour a day concentrated watching. Food and a special bird table would be provided.

Table and food duly arrived at the end of January. There were two boxes of food labelled Trial 1 and Trial 2, along with aluminium dishes and plastic measures; each box weighed about 21 lb! The table is about 2'6" by 1'4" with roof and a large metal tray - A.A. Five Star in the avian world. Each trial lasted 10 days with 10 different foods. The position of the dishes was changed every day. Two days before the trial started a packet of Swoop was provided so that the birds would get used to the table. I had to record which food was taken by which birds and the number of visits to the table. Maximum number in one hour was 95 Blue Tits on sliced peanuts.

A Robin was the first to patronise this arrangement, closely followed by a Blue Tit, and Blackbirds were not far behind. Chaffinches, Starlings, Greenfinches and House Sparrows, however, appeared inhibited and viewed the new bird table with the utmost suspicion, barely accepting it before the end of the survey period. I have wondered if this was because of the position of the table. Of necessity it had to be fairly close to the house so that we could be certain from which container they were feeding. Now that the survey is over the table has been put further away and, perversely, it is alive with gorging birds. What came out very strongly was that peanuts were the first choice. Only if peanuts were not available were the other seeds, such as black sunflower, taken in any quantity. Blackbirds tended to be the most vigorous eaters, spilling the seed on to the ground and also into neighbouring containers, which did not exactly help the scientific aspect of the survey. Chaffinches and Dunnocks were quite happy to 'hoover' up these seeds, preferring to do this rather than go to the table itself.

I enjoyed doing the survey, although I felt disappointed that so many species were inhibited at landing on the table. There was virtually no frosty weather during the survey period and possibly, if there had been, this might have made a difference. I now know the meaning of a "working breakfast" which some heads of state indulge in. Depending on the lightness of the morning, I used to do the survey between 8.00 and 9.00 am. This meant that my husband had to provide breakfast which was not my food preference but his, and very conservative it was too; just like the birds and their peanuts! Another aspect was that bird seed infiltrated most corners of the house, showing a great liking for getting into shoes and slippers. Whether I shall be informed of the nationwide results I rather doubt, as I think it was a market research project.

Marion Shimeld

Anyone wishing to join the garden bird feeding survey should write to the BTO at Beech Grove, Tring, Herts.

Blackcap goes bananas

This winter a Blackcap has been attracted to my garden for regular feeds of banana which I hang on a bush with clothes pegs. The mushier the bananas the more the bird seems to like them. Judging by the quantities it eats the fruit has been the mainstay of its diet this winter. Other species show little interest in the bananas so the Blackcap, which is very timid, has no competition to contend with.

Stanley Fisher

Blackcaps regularly take fruit through the winter but bananas would not normally be available to them.

Blackcap *David Mitchell*

A crow in one

We both had good drives at the fourth hole of Portobello's nine-hole course this morning, my partner with a yellow, and I with a white ball.

As we approached the green no balls were to be seen, and since I'd had my one and only hole in one at the fourth a few months before, I suggested that lightning might have struck twice. Just then a crow advanced from the fringe at the back of the green, a crow with a white beak. It went right up to the hole, stuck its beak into it, and emerged with a black beak.

My partner who, astonished, had picked out my hole-in-one ball months previously, was flabbergasted to have to do the same again.

Meanwhile, the crow was making for the back fringe again, towards my partner's yellow ball. Had we realised what might have happened, we might have seen a crow with a yellow beak giving my partner a hole in one too. But we were too close, and the crow flew off.

Do crows do this sort of thing regularly? And does it count as a hole in one?

George Main

This interesting event took place on 15 April 1988 and first appeared in the "Scotsman". Perhaps the crow had been inspired by a Scots golfer winning the US Masters the previous week.

Chairman's 13 versus Lothian Branch Select

The Chairman elected to bat first in this fixture on Islay on 11-14 March. On the crossing good views were obtained of our first Great Northern Divers and Black Guillemots, easy scoring here but difficult on Lothian pitches, and on a hurried trip to Bridgend we had our first views of Barnacles and Greenland Whitefronts in roadside fields. That evening Malcolm Ogilvie, the Director of Islay C.C. where we were based, gave us a short talk on the biology and politics of geese on the island which are definitely not cricket at the moment. Next day we travelled to Loch Gruinart where a Snow Goose was an easy ball amongst myriads of Barnacles. Several pairs of Choughs, a distant Hen Harrier and a flock of Twites were quickly notched up but best sighting was a pair of Otters, watched for half an hour as they munched shellfish in brine. Tideline Little Auks could not be counted as 'extras' but a pair of Ravens at their nest were fine to watch. Rain showers became too persistent however and play was stopped early. Next day on a good wicket (sunny, flat calm sea) we searched Loch Indaal where a fine flock of 445 Scaup, 35 Slavonian Grebes and 30 Pintail upped our score. A walk at Bridgend gave us many of the typical woodland species but we dipped on Dipper. David Bates hit a boundary with four roadside Brents on our way to Gruinart where a couple of hours were spent watching Barnacles, Merlins and Hen Harriers. A Water Rail conveniently called to give us an acceptable 'extra'. That evening Malcolm gave us a more general slide talk, revealing his all-round knowledge of Islay's wildlife and history. Next day, with a couple of Glaucous Gulls and a glimpse of our only Stonechat the side was well-pleased with its performance.

Next weekend it was the turn of the Branch Select to bat. They were severely hampered by a rough sea-crossing – it is reported that they were green with envy of the Chairman's side's passage. After this poor start the side settled down to some fine batting, seeing most of the birds knocked up by their opponents. Stonechats were apparently widespread, 200 Twites were seen at Gruinart and Hen Harriers were watched displaying. A first-winter Iceland Gull was well hit but a small dark Canada Goose, bowled by Malcolm Ogilvie to the team, flew off before it could add to the scoring. It was quickly rebowled however and this first-rate sighting is surely of a Category A bird!

The result of the match was close, both teams in the nineties, but the Branch Select narrowly won the honours. Our thanks go to Malcolm Ogilvie, our driver Ian and cook Rhona. This fixture will be repeated in 1989 – its much cheaper to get to than Australia and the beer is much better than in Pakistan.

Ian Botham

Peter Gordon, the Chairman of Lothians Branch, denies that he is going to walk round Aberlady Bay with three elephants to scare off the nudists and raise money for the Wader Scrape.

When not playing cricket Malcolm Ogilvie runs the Islay National History Trust and Field Centre based at Port Charlotte.

Raptor Results 1987

This report summarises the activities of four of the five Raptor Study Groups now active in Scotland. For the second year the data from Orkney and Shetland on Peregrine and Merlin has been included. A total of 37 occupied Eagle home ranges and 309 occupied Peregrine sites were monitored as well as 170+ Merlin sites.

This is the seventh report from North-east Scotland and the fourth from Central, South-west and South-east. The information has been gathered by an army of dedicated raptor workers throughout Scotland, most of whom are voluntary and work solely in their spare time. This report is presented on behalf of all contributors. The group co-ordinator for each species is included in brackets after each area heading.

PEREGRINE

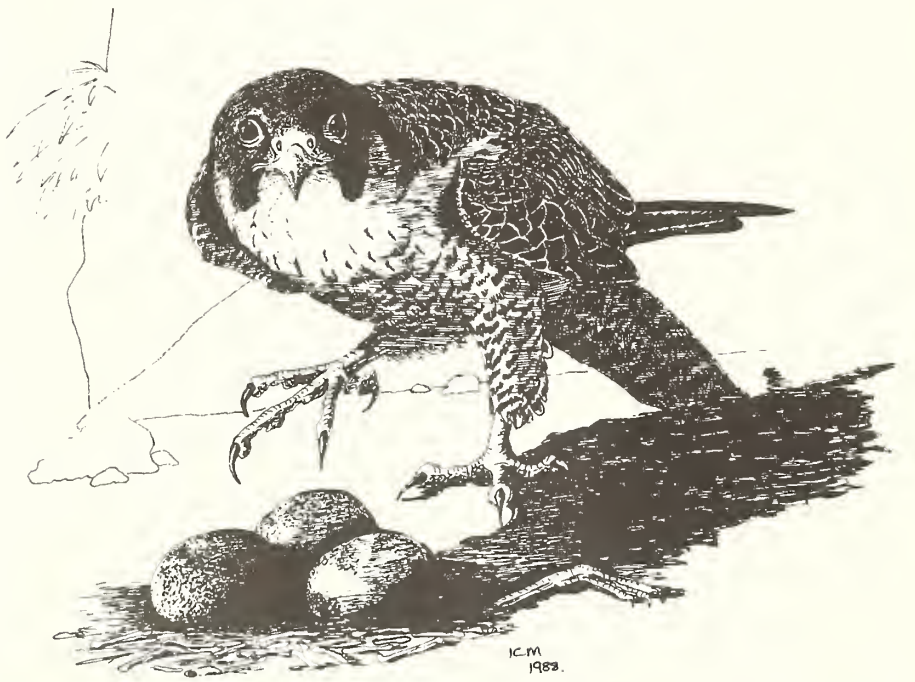
North-east Scotland RSG (Jon Hardey)
Of the 115 nest sites checked, 106 were occupied by pairs or single birds. Eggs were definitely laid at 78 sites of which at least 55 clutches hatched. Two pairs laid above 3,000 feet, both of which failed. Two clutches were probably stolen but failures because of the cold, wet weather were the main problem this year. Nests in sheltered localities were far more successful than the more open sites and there were signs of increased human persecution in some areas. Five sites were occupied by pairs on the coast with a single bird at a sixth. Two of these pairs failed but a total of six young were fledged from the remaining three. Young fledged at 47 to 49 sites with a grand total of 91 to 96+ young fledged. Breeding data from one estate was not available for inclusion in this report, which is disappointing.

South-east Scotland RSG (George Carse)
Of 33 sites checked, 31 were found to be occupied by single birds or pairs. At least 27 of these pairs laid eggs, including one clutch of five. A total of 16 clutches hatched with at least six nests robbed of chicks. Two nests failed because of disturbance and at least two others were destroyed/persecuted by deliberate human interference. Fourteen broods successfully fledged, producing a total of 32+ young.

Continued egg and chick thefts in this area as well as two incidents of deliberate destruction are extremely worrying.

Orkney (Eric Meek)
Fifteen sites were occupied (four down on last year), 11 of them by pairs. Eggs were laid at all 11 sites of which eight hatched; at least six pairs fledged young. The total number of young fledged is unknown but was thought to be at least eight. The mainland sites are faring very poorly with only two occupied sites, neither of which raised young.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)
Eight sites were occupied (same as last year), three by pairs. These pairs all laid but only one hatched, producing three fledged young. At one site the incubating female was heavily contaminated with Fulmar oil; almost certainly the same female was later picked up in poor condition and subsequently died.



Female Peregrine at the nest *Iain MacLeod*

Central Scotland RSG (Patrick Stirling-Aird)
Eighty sites were checked with 73 found to be occupied, with at least 66 pairs present. Eggs were laid in 54 scrapes with a total of 44 clutches hatching. There were no definite robberies although a few sites lost eggs to unknown causes. One particularly serious incident of persecution was found when a poisoned Rabbit was found on an occupied nest ledge in north Perthshire. Forty-two sites successfully fledged a total of 98 young. A much better year than last year (43 young in 1987) and numbers back up to earlier levels (92 fledged in 1985 and 99+ in 1984), the better spring and summer weather being an important factor.

South-west Scotland RSG (Dick Roxburgh)
A better year in this area than in 1986, primarily due to better weather. Seventy-six sites were found with birds present (at least two areas were not covered properly and this figure is definitely a minimum). Of the sites checked 61 pairs laid of which at least 51 hatched. Two clutches of eggs were stolen and a further four failed to hatch for other reasons. One pair was shot during incubation! Young were stolen from two sites. Forty-eight nests successfully fledged a grand total of 105+ young.

GOLDEN EAGLE

North-east Scotland RSG (Robert Rae)
Seventeen pairs were found to be occupying home ranges in this area (the number of home ranges occupied by single birds was not available). At least 13 pairs laid, with at least one egg in each clutch hatching. All 13 sites produced young and 14 young fledged. This is the same number of young as in 1986 but the pattern of success between years is different. In that year, fewer pairs hatched with only eight pairs fledging young although there were more successfully fledged broods of two.

Central Scotland RSG (Dave Dick, Roger Broad and Don MacCaskill)
Twenty-two home ranges were checked with 20 occupied. In three home ranges with pairs present built up nests were found but no signs of eggs laid. Eight pairs did manage to lay, with five successfully hatching, each producing a single fledged chick. Three clutches failed to hatch and one site suffered human interference.

KESTREL

South-west Scotland RSG (Gordon Riddle)
A better year than the dreadful 1986 season, with fledging success almost back to the 1985 level. Forty-two territories were checked with 30 pairs recorded (71% occupation). The season started early due to good weather with the first egg on April 11th. The average clutch size was high with 5.3 for the 25 full clutches recorded, which was up to the level of the record year of 1984. Seventy per cent of eggs hatched but due to cold and wet conditions in early June, survival at the brood stage dropped below 73% (the same as 1986). A total of 68 young were ringed from 18 broods (25 young in 1986, 78 young in 1985, and 137 in 1984). An average year with 2.4 young per breeding attempt and 3.6 young per successful pair. Three clutches were stolen and one pair shot.

MERLIN

North-east and Central Scotland RSGs
This is a combined summary as there was overlap of coverage in Tayside.

Perthshire (Graham Rebecca)
Twenty-eight occupied sites were checked with 24 pairs laying. At least 16 hatched with 48 young ringed at 14 sites. At least 43 young fledged (1.79 young per clutch).

Angus (Ron Downing)
Of the sites checked, 14 were found with birds present in which 9+ pairs laid. Of these, eight hatched producing 21 to 23 young (2.3 young per clutch laid). Twenty-one young were ringed.

Donside (Brian Cosnette)
This is a relatively newly checked area, first looked at in 1986 but already a good number of sites has been found. Eleven sites had birds present with nine pairs, eight of which laid. Six clutches hatched, successfully producing a total of 19 young (2.37 young per clutch). All but one of these nests was on the ground in heather, the exception being a crow nest in an isolated pine which failed at the egg stage.

Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and Kincardineshire (Graham Rebecca, Jon Hardey, Alastair Duncan)
From a total of c.80 areas visited, 31 pairs were found, 27 laid, 23 hatched and 19 pairs successfully fledged at least 56 young (2.47 young fledged per clutch).

In North-east and Central RSG areas a grand total of 151 young Merlins were ringed.

South-west Scotland RSG (Dick Roxburgh)
Thirteen sites were found with birds present. Eleven pairs laid, five in trees, the rest on the ground. One pair laid its first clutch in the tree, then repeated on the ground; both clutches failed. Two pairs laid their first clutches on the ground and then re-laid in trees. Overall nine clutches hatched, and successfully fledged a total of 31 young, including one brood of five (2.8 fledged young per clutch).

South-east Scotland RSG (Alan Heavisides and RSPB staff)
1987 was a reasonably good year in South-east Scotland with several new areas looked at and many new sites. Overall, 37 sites were found to be occupied, 27 pairs definitely laid (two others probably laid). Five nests were in trees, the rest in heather. All five tree nests were successful. Three ground nests were predated and three clutches failed to hatch. Of the 23 clutches which did hatch, 22 were successful, producing a total of 63+ young (2.3 fledged young per clutch).

Orkney (Eric Meek)
Eight occupied sites were located all producing eggs. One nest failed at the egg stage and the others successfully reared a total of 21 young (2.6 fledged young per clutch laid). This is the best year in Orkney since 1981.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)
A total of 27 sites were occupied, 24 of these by pairs. Twenty-two clutches were located, of which 16 hatched and 16 sites successfully fledged a total of 52 young (2.3 fledged young per clutch).

Iain C. MacLeod, RSPB, Edinburgh

PEREGRINE

	NE	C	SW	SE	Ork	Shet	Total
Home ranges/sites with bird(s) present	106	73	76	31	15	8	309
Home ranges/sites in which eggs laid	78	54	61	27+	11	3	234+
Home ranges/sites in which eggs hatched	55	44	51+	16	8	1	175+
Home ranges/sites in which chicks fledged (prob. fledged)	47(2)	42	48+	14	6(2)	1	158(4)+
Total young fledged	91(5)+	98	105+	32+	8+	3	337(5)+

GOLDEN EAGLE

	NE	C	Total
Home ranges/sites with pairs present	17	20	37
Home ranges/sites in which eggs laid	13	8	21
Home ranges/sites in which eggs hatched	13	5	18
Home ranges/sites in which chicks fledged	13+	5	18+
Total young fledged	14	5	19

MERLIN

	NE & C	SW	SE	Ork	Shet	Total
Sites with birds present	85(1)	13	37	8	27	170(1)
Sites in which eggs laid (prob. laid)	64(1)	11	27(2)	8	22+	132(3)
Sites in which eggs hatched	49+	9	23	7	16	104
Sites in which chicks fledged	46+	9	22	7	16	100
Total young fledged	140(2)+	31	63+	21	52	307(2)+

Lethal team work

Holidaying in Sutherland in September 1987 I was parked in a layby along-side Loch More. I was watching a small herd of deer high on the slopes of Beinn Lice, when a Golden Eagle appeared and commenced to fly backwards and forwards over the herd. The deer then moved forward towards a range of crags on the mountain side and in the next minute I had two Golden Eagles in view.

The pair of eagles then began to swoop and dive towards the deer driving the herd nearer the crags, then, with the skill of a pair of sheep dogs, drove the deer along a very narrow ledge which ran along the cliff face. By continuous swooping and diving the eagles managed to get the deer to move along the ledge in single file; the two eagles then patrolled overhead and waited until a small calf was in the middle of the ledge. One eagle dived onto the calf clutching it with its talons in the middle of the back. The eagle then rose and dropped the screaming deer on to the rocks below; it was done so quickly all was over in a second.

I went up the mountain side to find the young deer badly smashed up and the two eagles above me waiting for me to depart. Later, from the car, I observed one eagle return to the kill.

E. Guest

Merlin *Iain MacLeod*

Editorial Incompetence

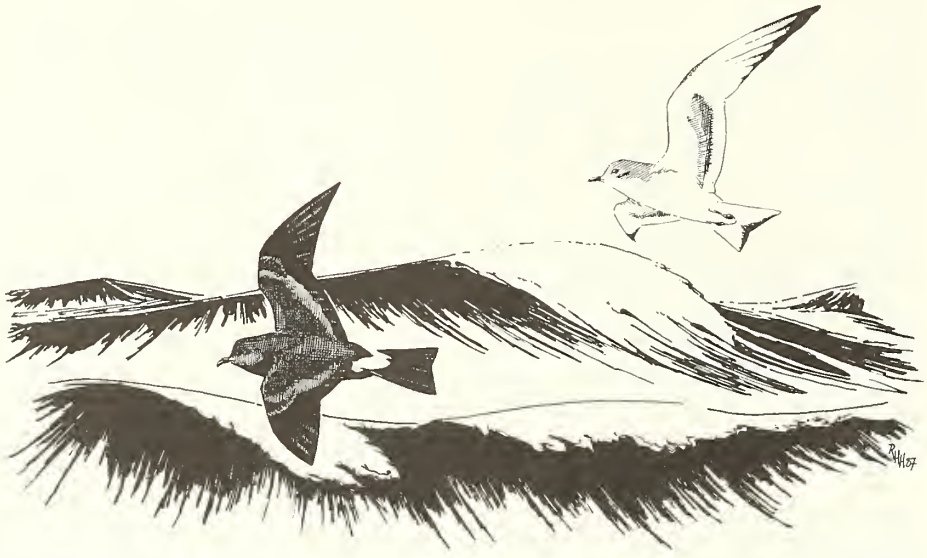
Writing for *SBN* is always fraught with risk. When Norman Elkins' family saw his piece on Wagtails and a Stoat in the March issue they immediately pointed out that he was incorrectly described as *Normal* Elkins; he hopes it was the typesetting they objected to. Also in the last issue the diagram referred to by Robert Moss and Adam Watson in their article on Red Grouse was replaced by a photograph by the Editor who omitted to alter the text accordingly. Apologies to all.

SdP

A life on the ocean wave

With the advent of North Sea oil in the mid-1970s fears grew that seabird mortality from oiling would increase. Seabird numbers and distribution during the breeding season were relatively well documented but no-one really knew where seabirds spent the greater part of the year when they were not at their colonies. No-one knew the numbers of seabirds that might be involved in any oil pollution incident. In response to this need the Nature Conservancy Council set up the Seabirds at Sea Team in 1979 to improve knowledge of seabird distribution in the North Sea.

Exploration for oil has now begun to the north-west of Scotland. No extraction is being carried out; this may occur in the future. As advisors to the government, NCC will be required to comment and make recommendations on any developments. These recommendations, which in the North Sea are incorporated frequently into oil companies' development strategies, aim to ensure that high risk operations occur only at times when few birds are in the area. Recommendations need to be based on good survey information and in 1986 surveys to determine the distribution of seabirds at sea began off north-west Scotland; the survey area has since been extended to cover south-west Scotland and the Irish Sea.



Leach's Petrel and Sabine's Gull *Angus Hogg*

Superlative seabirds

Three million seabirds breed round the coast of north-west Scotland and on the scattered offshore islands that lie between Orkney and Rhum. The list of superlatives is long; St Kilda holds the world's largest Gannetry and the biggest Puffinry in western Europe; Rhum has the largest colony of Manx Shearwaters in the eastern Atlantic, and the majority of Europe's population of Leach's Petrels breed on four remote islands: St Kilda, Flannans, North Rona and Sula Sgeir. In fact this area holds the largest British breeding colonies of most of our seabirds with the exception of the skuas, gulls and terns.

Survey methods

Since the start of 1986 observations have been carried out throughout the year in all weathers and I can personally attest to the fact that Scotland gets some of the worst weather there is! Any thoughts that the job consists of cruising sedately through sun-dappled Hebridean waters are quickly dispelled when you are battering out to Rockall in a Force 12 in January. Few boats ply these waters, but we were able to obtain passage on ferries, research and fisheries protection ships; we are most grateful to Caledonian MacBrayne, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and the Natural Environment Research Council for allowing us to work from their vessels. These trips allow us to cover relatively large areas at low cost but their main disadvantage is that we have no control over the ship's route. In order to cover specific areas at certain times of year we have had to charter a vessel. To date we have done this three times; to St Kilda and North Rona during the breeding season and for a survey of moulting auks over much of north-west Scotland in autumn 1986. The other method we use to assess seabird numbers is by aerial survey; this allows us to examine coastal areas inside the normal shipping routes but too far out to be counted from land.

Vulnerable auks

Seabirds vary in their susceptibility to oil pollution and the auks are amongst the most vulnerable due to the large amount of time they spend on the water. During the breeding season, auks stay close to their colonies – observations round North Rona found most to be feeding within 5 km of the island but they appeared to range further afield from St Kilda. Some Guillemots were seen flying towards the colony with fish from as far away as 55 km. Auks are especially vulnerable to oiling in the autumn when all the species (except Puffins) moult their flight feathers rendering them flightless for 6-7 weeks. At this time the Minch becomes extremely important with gatherings of large numbers of Guillemots and Razorbills. We are not certain how many auks moult to the south of the Minch; this will be investigated in August this year when we will survey the entire west coast of Britain. Many Puffins are also present in these flocks. The Minch continues to hold important numbers of auks throughout the winter but many appear to leave the area at this time, possibly for the North Sea. Future studies will investigate the link between auk distribution and various physical and oceanographic features.

Elusive petrels

Fulmars are the most widespread and abundant species we record on our surveys. Many stay close to their colonies throughout the year but very large numbers gather to squabble over waste and discards from fishing vessels which work along the edge of the continental shelf. Other petrels also tend to congregate around these boats; one of my most memorable sightings was of a mixed flock of 50 Storm and Leach's Petrels feeding on fish oil off the stern of a trawler. Leach's Petrels are seen almost exclusively along the edge of the continental shelf but they are rather enigmatic as the number we see is low in comparison to the apparent breeding population; we don't really know where most of them go. Few Storm Petrels are seen within sight of land and this may be a response to the need to avoid predation from gulls and skuas which forage close inshore. In contrast, Manx Shearwaters are recorded mostly within the Minch as are Sooty Shearwaters from July onwards. About one quarter of the world's Gannet population breeds in north-west Scotland, mostly on St Kilda. They too are a feature of bird flocks at offshore trawlers and many feed in the northern Minch and around the Flannan Islands.

Important areas

What has been most evident from the work carried out so far is the importance of the Minch. The largest concentrations of birds are found here during summer and autumn with lower numbers throughout the rest of the year. Waters around colonies on offshore islands are important mainly during the breeding season. Other offshore areas can sometimes hold great numbers of birds but these tend to be associated with fishing activities and disperse when these stop. The species in these flocks, such as Fulmars and Gannets, are less susceptible to oiling due to their aerial lifestyle. It is inshore areas in which the greatest care is needed and any impacts minimised.

Acknowledgments

This phase of the Seabirds at Sea project would not have been possible without the generous assistance of the Departments of Transport, Energy and of the Environment for Northern Ireland, British Petroleum, Esso, Shell, Chevron and Hydrocarbons Great Britain.

Stuart Benn, Seabirds at Sea Team

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 1988

The Drumossie Hotel, Inverness was the venue for the 1988 joint S.O.C./B.T.O. Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference on Saturday 7th March, attended by 125 members and friends. Dr Stan da Prato, S.O.C. President, opened proceedings with a reminder to the membership that the club was not 21 Regent Terrace or the bookshop but the membership and branches.

Dr Jim Reid, Scottish Organiser for the new Breeding Bird Atlas discussed the aims and limitations of the survey and explained the methodology. Colin Galbraith (N.C.C.), stepping in for Eric Bignal, extolled the value of the Atlas in providing data for planners and conservationists. The international value of Scottish blanket mires and bogs and the techniques involved in quantifying their bird populations were then considered by David Stroud also of N.C.C. Following observations of species density on various land forms, the modern researcher can retire to the office and, with the aid of a computer and satellite photographs extrapolate data to provide estimates of population. The method has allowed N.C.C. to estimate the wader populations lost due to afforestation in the flow country.

After lunch which featured a bowl of broth looking not unlike another of those satellite photographs, Bob Swann of the Highland Ringing Group talked about the Moray Firth wader studies. Ringing c.25,000 waders has shown that Redshank are predominantly Icelandic and Oystercatchers largely local birds. Movements of Curlew are now under investigation using plumage dyes, Malcolm Harvey showed what the keen amateur can achieve in his account of Slavonian Grebes north of the Great Glen. Despite returning to breeding sites earlier than Continental birds, Scottish Slavs apparently delay laying until the vegetation has grown sufficiently to provide cover for their nests. Low productivity and lack of information on their wintering areas causes concern.

Helen Young of Dundee University then described her research on the SOC's emblem in Speyside. She aims to identify critical features of native pinewoods and plantations used by Crested Tits so advice can be given on woodland management. The effects of woodland management on birds was discussed by Rob Fuller of the BTO. Bird numbers and diversity decrease from SE England to NW Scotland but more studies of how management affects bird populations are needed, especially in Scotland.

John Wyatt, also from Beech Grove, who nearly missed the Conference due to a car accident, commented on the amount of fieldwork now going on and the plans for a new BTO HQ to accommodate all the resulting data and associated staff. CBC and Estuary volunteers are still needed; only two Farmland CBCs are current in Scotland. Anybody interested in participating or oof finding (ask someone who was there) should contact their local BTO Rep.

Jeremy Greenwood, nowadays smartly suited as the new Director of BTO, proposed a well merited vote of thanks to all concerned and asked everyone to get out, get involved and above all enjoy yourself; a fitting conclusion to an enjoyable and informative day.

Steward Pritchard

Black-headed Gulls chasing bats

On midsummer's night I was staying in a caravan at Bettyhill, Sutherland, with the idea of watching sunset and sunrise. Around 10.30 pm we noticed several bats flying over. Shortly afterwards four Black-headed Gulls appeared and started to chase the bats. Fast acrobatic chases continued for approximately 15 minutes, but the gulls failed to catch their prey. I do not know what type of bat was involved, but assumed them to be Pipistrelles. Visibility was good despite the late hour, and all the observers were sober!

David Omand

Dippers swimming on surface

In March 1987 I watched a pair of Dippers feeding in a loch on North Harris. The birds were feeding in clear water c. 1m deep and, in the total absence of wind, the surface was perfectly calm. The birds began feeding by flying from the shore c. 2-10m out where they landed on the surface, holding themselves there with their wings open, occasionally flapping. On diving they returned to the surface still several metres from shore. The prey was either then swallowed and the dive repeated or the bird would fly to the shore where the prey was tossed against a rock before being swallowed.

Stuart Rae

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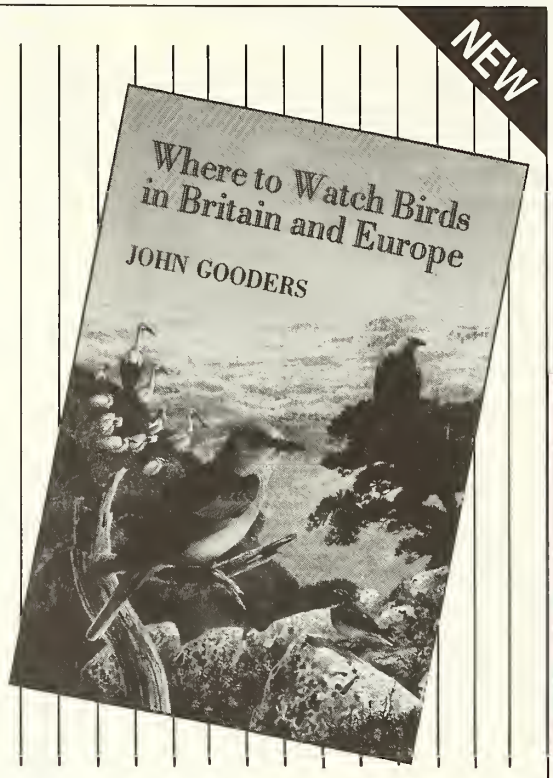

CHRISTOPHER HELM
PUBLISHERS LIMITED

Oil Pollution in the Moray Firth

A serious oil pollution incident occurred in the Inner Moray Firth on and around the weekend of 23/24 January 1988. Small amounts of oil came ashore at Cromarty, Shandwick, Balintore and Whiteness. Over the next few days, both dead and live oiled birds appeared on beaches at Chanonry Point, Fortrose, Cromarty, Nigg, the Inner Cromarty Firth, Balintore, Nairn and Whiteness. The oil on the beaches was very fresh. We believe that given the weather conditions at the time and the nature of the oil the incident occurred near land off Balintore and the mouth of the Cromarty Firth. Oil samples were collected by RPSB staff and have been sent off for analysis. RSPB staff and Beached Bird Survey volunteers monitored the area and so far we can account for 37 casualties, including 19 Long-tailed Ducks, 13 Guillemots, 2 Razorbills, 1 Puffin, 1 Eider and a single Gannet. Although we believe that only a small amount of oil was involved, this incident occurred in an area where there is a regular wintering flock of over 2000 Long-tailed Ducks. Undoubtedly, many more birds were affected than have so far been encountered for, many of which will be picked-up during the next series of Beached Bird Surveys.

Highland Branch

Cormorant taken by Grey Seal

Whilst walking along the shore of the Beauly Firth on a calm day with the tide in full flood I saw a disturbance in the water some fifty yards offshore. A Cormorant broke the surface and attempted to become airborne, however only its head, neck and one wing was seen above the water. The bird then appeared to struggle violently before disappearing again under the surface. Ten seconds later the whole performance was repeated only this time the bird did not resurface. Less than a minute later two Grey Seals appeared.

I have no doubt that the Cormorant had fallen victim to a seal, but whether the bird had been taken whilst itself hunting underwater or had been dragged down from the surface I cannot say.

Do diving birds form a regular part of the diet of Grey Seals feeding in inshore waters?

M J Strickland

A search through Scottish Birds and British Birds shows that seals have been seen taking a variety of aquatic birds includings auks, divers and ducks. How regular this is is doubtful, the Handbook of British Mammals states that birds are only taken occasionally.

Speyside sanctuary

In February the R.S.P.B. bought the Abernethy Forest Estate, more than 30 square miles of forest, moorland and mountain. It is the largest ever land purchase in Europe by a voluntary conservation organisation and cost £1.8 million, a million pounds of which was granted by the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Nature Conservancy Council.

The new reserve includes 4,000 acres of pine forest already a National Nature Reserve by agreement with the previous owners. It rises through heather moorland to Cairngorm and borders two other R.S.P.B. reserves, Loch Garten and Upper Glen Avon, forming a 29,000 acre wildlife sanctuary. The Scots Pines in Abernethy are directly descended from the Caledonian Pine forest which once covered large tracts of the Scottish Highlands. Over the past 500 years more than 99 per cent of that forest has been destroyed, leaving only scattered fragments of which Abernethy is the largest.

Ultimately it is hoped the pine will spread to cover twice its present area benefiting birds which include Capercaillie, Crested Tit and Scottish Crossbill. Birds of prey such as Peregrine and Golden Eagle breed on the reserve and on the high tops are Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting and Dotterel. There are tracks and trails through the new reserve and visitors are welcome.

Reviews

***Where to Watch Birds in Britain and Europe** by John Gooders; Christopher Helm; 1988; 254pp; many sketches and maps; £9.95.*

Eighteen years after the original 'European Gooders' this totally rewritten version has been expanded to include Morocco, Israel, Turkey, Cyprus and Crete. Each country receives on average seven detailed entries, in typical Gooders style, however the author caters for all tastes. Some sites he calls 'a bit dude' (adjacent to easily accessible tourist venues), others vary from cafes where Lesser Kestrels vie with ice-cold beer, to one place in eastern Turkey where accommodation needs a padlock and key and/or large wooden wedges to ensure privacy! Britain seems out of place in this book, and anyway is now more than adequately covered by other guides. Maps are invaluable in the field and greater use could have been made of them. Errors appear to be few, although it is rather optimistic these days to expect to see 500-600 Slender-billed Curlew at a single site in Morocco (four is the maximum in recent years).

The amount of information available (albeit largely unpublished) to birders planning trips abroad has increased so much that it is surprising that this book remains not only invaluable but also alone in its field.

Ian J. Andrews

***A Field Guide to the Waders of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East** by Peter Colston and Philip Burton; Hodder & Stoughton; 1988; 224 pages; 23 colour plates, many drawings, 53 maps; £9.95.*

I've been an admirer of Philip Burton's painting since his Wader plates appeared in BWP Vol. III five years ago. The colour plates in this field guide are superb and the book worth buying for these alone.

This book has been a long time coming, passing between publishers and overshadowed by "Shorebirds". It shouldn't be. "Shorebirds" is a magisterial tome, this is a European, not World, field guide and more. H & S are not known for their bird books but are to be congratulated on their production of this one.

The introduction is interestingly written describing feeding, migration, courtship displays and mating systems. There follows the 87 species accounts. Each has sections on identification (of course), voice, habitat, distribution, movements, feeding, social and breeding behaviour and nest, eggs and young. There are 52 distribution maps at the back.

The colour plates show adult breeding and winter plumages where different, immatures and flight views. Opposite each plate are key identification points for each species including flight and voice where applicable.

An excellent book which should be in the pocker or car of every Wader watcher. I'll keep my copy in my bookshelf so I can admire the colour plates.

John Davies

***Birds of the Middle East and North Africa** by P.A.D. Hollom, R.F. Porter, S. Christensen and Ian Willis; Poyser; 1988; 280 pp; 40 colour plates, over 100 line drawings and 510 maps; £14.00.*

This book is intended as a companion guide to *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom. It includes all the 700+ known species occurring in North Africa and the Middle East. Where Peterson adequately covers a species, identification details are omitted but full details of distribution, status and habitat are given. More than 350 species are well illustrated in colour. The 510 maps provide up to date information on distribution. There is a comprehensive list of references, a checklist and English and scientific names indices.

This companion field guide is a new departure for Poysers, but one to which they have brought their unequalled professionalism in ornithological publishing. We now have field guide coverage of the birds of the Western Palearctic *plus* Arabia and Iran. This new book will prove essential to any birdwatcher visiting these regions.

John Davies

***Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Vol 5: Tyrant flycatchers to Thrushes;** edited by Stanley Cramp and others; OUP; 1988; 1063 pp; 84 colour plates plus many maps and diagrams; £75.00.*

Volume 5 of this magisterial series covers larks, hirundines, wagtails and pipits, Dipper, Wren, accentors and the chats and thrushes. It is the biggest yet and the first to break the 1,000 page barrier. It is also the dearest, but can you afford to be without it – especially as we are now into the real birds ie the Passerines!

SdP

***Birdwatching with Bill Oddie** by Bill Oddie; Macmillan; 1988; 199 pp; many b&w photos and illustrations; £8.95.*

This is an adult introduction to birdwatching in Bill Oddie's inimitable style. There are the usual chapters on Essential Equipment, Identifying Birds and The Birds – an *almost* useless list of species, notes and tips. The photographs, mostly of Bill Oddie, are terrible and the drawings just as bad – and I'll never forgive him for recommending that you buy your bird books from our competitor and not the Bird Bookshop.

John Davies

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£10.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£4.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£14.50
Life, individual £200.00, family £300.00	
Pensioner, individual £6.00, family £8.50	

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

APRIL PUBLICATION

Birds of the Middle East and North Africa

by P. A. D. Hollom
R. F. Porter, S. Christensen
and Ian Willis

This long-awaited companion bird-guide includes all known breeding, wintering, migratory and accidental species in the region, from Morocco to Iran and Arabia. Over 700 species are covered, of which Ian Willis illustrates more than 350 species in colour, showing sex, age and seasonal differences where appropriate; in addition there are many black and white identification drawings in the text. The latter treats identification with especial thoroughness in the species accounts but there are also sections for voice, habitat and status.
A special feature is the 510 two-colour breeding distribution maps which provide more up to date information than is to be found in any comparable source. The authors have long associations with the region and this distillation of their knowledge and expertise has provided a much needed guide of unequalled excellence.

22 × 14 cm, 280 pages plus 40 colour plates, distribution maps, many line illustrations, £14.00 net

T & A D POYSER

SOC Notices

S.O.C. Sponsored Birdwatch 1988

If your are aged between one month and one hundred and one years, eager for an ornithological challenge and of cheerful disposition, then why not consider participating in the S.O.C. 1988 Sponsored Birdwatch on the day of your choice in October? Our Club President and Council fully support the event which is being held to assist funding of the Scottish Organiser of the New Atlas of Breeding Birds. The official date for the birdwatch is the 15th, however any day in October is quite acceptable and the event is not confined to Scotland or indeed Europe! All participants contributing over £15 and over £25 sponsorship will be entered in prize draws and in addition there will be a prize for the participant who contributes the largest sum from sponsorship. Full details including prizes will appear in the next issue of *Scottish Bird News* which will also include a sponsorship form and instruction sheet.

Please remember this is not a race or competition, we need your support and every sum of money collected whether large or small will be appreciated. **Mrs Black and Mrs Brown, S.O.C. Sponsored Birdwatch, 21 Regent Terrace.**

Annual Raffle 1987

A very warm thank you from the Borders Branch to all those who supported the Raffle. A marvellous response brought in £1102 from ticket sales, including some donations in lieu. Expenses were £149 made up of Printing £75, Registration Fee £12, half the 1st Prize (the other half was donated) £50, and £12 for Postage. A cheque for £953 was sent to 21 Regent Terrace for the net sum raised. While this is just short of the £1000 net we aimed for, the result is excellent and a very healthy boost to the Club's general funds.

As members were advised, the draw eventually was made at the Borders Branch meeting on 8 February 1988, and a list of all winners and prizes was sent to Branches. If any member wishes a copy please write to 21 Regent Terrace with an sae. As well as those who bought tickets, we would like to thank all who sold them and those who so generously gave the 21 prizes. The effort was well worthwhile and of considerable benefit to our Club. On a personal note, it was good to hear from so many of you; thank you very much for writing.

Finally, the Branch has been asked to arrange another raffle later this year. This will get it back to its former timing, with sales at the September and October branch meetings, and the draw after the speeches at the Annual Dinner. Full details in the next *SBN*.

Alastair Peirse-Duncombe

Annual Conference

This year's Annual Conference will be at The Marine Hotel, North Berwick from Friday 28th to Sunday 30th October. The conference theme is ''Scottish Seabirds''. Details of the conference programme and booking form will be enclosed with the September issue of *SBN*.

Branch Meetings

The dates of the first branch meetings in September are:

Monday, 12th September: Grampian, Borders & Clyde
Tuesday, 13th September: Lothian, Highland & West Galloway
Wednesday, 14th September: Ayrshire, Dumfries, Fife & Caithness
Thursday, 15th September: Tayside & Stirling
Thursday, 22nd September: Stewartry

The Bird Bookshop

The 1988 Spring/Summer Supplement with details of all the new ornithological and natural history books published is now available from your Bird Bookshop. Just telephone 031-556 6042 anytime and leave your name and address.

Staff Changes

Fiona Slack has been promoted Bookshop Manager upon the departure of Moira Rix. Dorothy Ridley finally retired at the end of March and Rose Allan (part-time packer) also left then. Fiona Melville and Craig Whyte have joined the staff as Bookshop Assistants and Dot Divens as packer. Finally Kate Donaghy joins as John Davies's new P.A.

Subscriptions Increase

At the general meeting held in Edinburgh in April, the new subscription rates were approved. Details of these together with renewal slips will be sent out with the September mailing of *SBN*. Club members who pay by bankers' order will receive a letter asking them to complete a new order for the new subscription rate.

Surveys and Research Committee

The Chairman is now Allan W. Brown who can be contacted at **232 Rullion Road, Penicuik, Midlothian.**

Atlas Fund Raising

We are now more than two thirds of the way towards the £40,000 needed to fund the New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Scotland. Major support has come from the Nature Conservancy Council in the form of two grants; one from the Chief Scientist's Directorate in Peterborough and the other from NCC Scottish HQ in Edinburgh. Substantial grants have also been received from the Gilman Trust and the Carnegie Universities Trust. Most encouraging have been the recent substantial contributions from the Scottish business community. We are grateful also to Ian Darling and his committee and club members Geoff Ball and Nigel Suess for their hard work in raising the money for this worthwhile project.

Fair Isle's Fortieth

Last March, Fair Isle Bird Observatory celebrated its 40th anniversary and launched an appeal for £¼ million for major reconstruction of the Observatory. Established in 1948 in old Nissen huts, the Observatory moved to its present timber building in 1969. Over the last twenty years the ravages of the Shetland climate have taken their toll. Redevelopment plans include a new block and harled outer wall and an extension with extra facilities for ornithologists. We hope Club members will support our sister organisation, FIBOT, in this their 40th Anniversary Appeal.

Seasonal Bothies on small islands

We are gathering material on seasonal dwellings in Scotland. One area which interests us is the use of seasonal bothies, huts or caves by fishermen, grazing tenants, fowlers and others, especially on the smaller islands. It strikes us that your members may have come upon examples of the shells or ruins of such structures, which in certain cases were built of stone and turf. For instance, Fraser Darling and Harvey-Brown refer to the remains of a fisherman's hut on Fladda; Pennant noted the vestiges of places used by fishermen on Ailsa Craig and there are references to others on the Shiants and at Stenness, Shetland. We would welcome any description approx. dimensions, materials, locations etc. - as well as the possibility of sketches or photos, for copying and return. Your help will be acknowledged in any publication by **Roger Leitch & Bruce Walker, School of Architecture, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, 13 Perth Road, Dundee DD1 4HT.**

Birds of the Isle of Skye

Work is now proceeding on a book on Birds of the Isle of Skye. The area to be dealt with includes Skye itself, Raasay, Soay and other adjacent islands, the surrounding sea areas and the mainland coast immediately opposite Skye. I would be glad to have any records either single records or more detailed lists. I would also be glad to know of any published records, perhaps in the less available journals. All help will be fully acknowledged. The timescale is ''as soon as possible'', but a simple guide aimed at tourists/visitors may precede the main book. Send information to **Andrew Currie, Glaiseilean, Harrapool, Broadford, Isle of Skye IV49 9AQ.**

North Rona and Sulasgeir

We are compiling The Birds of North Rona and Sulasgeir for publication by N.C.C. We would be interested in any bird records and dates of landings on either island. All records will be acknowledged by **Stuart Benn & Stuart Murray, N.C.C., 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE.**

Achtung!

Ornithologist and naturalist in West Germany 21 years old and at present making amends for the army, is looking for contact with ornithologists in Scotland; conversation in English or German **Christian Tunk, Niedernhofstr. 26, 5800 Hagen, Western Germany.**

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Birds

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Ian Andrews

A national disgrace

English football hooligans captured the headlines but they were not the only vandals damaging Britain's reputation in 1988. More quietly, but just as destructively, the illegal use of poison continued in remote parts of Scotland far from the embarrassing glare of media attention.

In the first half of this year RSPB Scotland knew of two incidents with Phosdrin, four with Strychnine and seven involving Alphachloralose; severals others were at the analysis stage when we went to press. Two of the Alphachloralose incidents involved Golden Eagles. A male bird found dead on its eyrie in Caenlochan National Nature Reserve by Keith Brockie had almost certainly picked up poison from a neighbouring estate and carried it back to the nest. The police were called but could take no action as the estate in question denied all knowledge of the poison found on their land by RSPB Investigations Officer Dave Dick two days after Keith found the Eagle. In May holidaymakers on Islay found two dead Eagles on land belonging to the Islay Estates Company Ltd. This incident made the front pages of several national newspapers as the company's shareholders include brothers Peter and Charles Morrison, both Conservative MP's and one of them deputy chairman of the Tory Party. Neither MP lives on Islay and no evidence has been produced to show that they had any knowledge of the illegal killings. However some people on Islay are clearly putting down poison and it would be nice to see public figures with a stake in the island give a lead in condemning a practice which has been going on there for years.

Alphachloralose is only approved for general use as a rodenticide to be used under cover as it is so dangerous to birds and household pets. It can be used in other circumstances but only under special licence eg. to remove Herring Gulls from rooftops where other, non lethal methods have failed. Readers should be aware there is a lobby to allow this poison to be used against crows and foxes; this would be a disaster for Buzzards and both Golden and White-tailed Eagles.

Once again we urge any readers who come across evidence of attempts to kill raptors to contact the RSPB at 17 Regent Terrace immediately. The cases described here are only the tip of a very large and rotten iceberg.

SdP

Golden Eagle *Arthur Gilpin*

S.O.C. Sponsored Birdwatch

Enclosed with this issue of SBN you will find details and sponsorship form for the SOC Sponsored Birdwatch. Can you afford not to spare a day in October and participate to help benefit the funding of the Scottish Organiser of the New Atlas of Breeding Birds? By the time you read this the first year's fieldwork will have been completed and we are sure you will have enjoyed it enough to stimulate you to help ensure that it continues on a sound financial footing for the next two years.

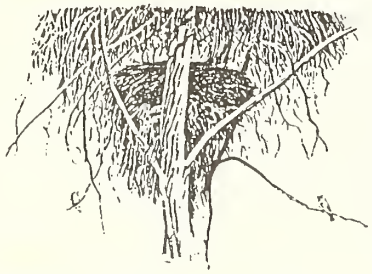
The first SOC Sponsored Birdwatch in 1986 raised £2500 with only 100 participants; with the world as your oyster ..... catcher we are confident this figure can be surpassed.

We are grateful to the following companies who have donated prizes: Graham Tiso: Westcroft Hydrophillic waterproof jacket with matching trousers; The Gates Rubber Company Limited: 3 pairs of Hunter green wellies; Walker's of Aberlour: hamper of products; Belhaven Brewery Company: Case of beer; Simmers: whisky cake; Paterson-Bronte: six tins of shortbread; Rowntree: box of chocolates; Drambuie Liqueur Co. Ltd.: jigsaw and apron; Thomas Tunnock: four dozen caramel wafers and 3 dozen tea cakes.

We look forward to a bulging postbag in November and distributing prizes in early December. Good luck on the day.

Lyndesay Brown and Pam Black

August Publication



The Sparrows

by J. Denis Summers-Smith

This authoritative monograph on the genus *Passer* covers the world's 20 species of 'true sparrows' which, today, have an almost worldwide distribution.

As well as the detailed, individual species accounts there are chapters discussing sparrow characteristics and relationships, sparrow evolution and their systematic position.

Robert Gillmor's eight colour plates superbly illustrate all the species and a further 62 of his drawings grace the text pages. In addition, there are over 100 maps and diagrams.

344 pages, £22.00 net

September publication

Birds and Berries

by Barbara & David Snow

The main theme of the book (the third of its three Parts) explores the implications of plant/bird associations and interactions, the coevolution of some species and the adaptions of others to their own, exclusive advantage.

In Part one, the authors give accounts by species of the trees and shrubs they watched in their study area. Similarly, Part two records the bird species feeding, or attempting to feed (or preventing other birds feeding), on the fruits.

The text offers many insights not generally perceived by the ornithologist or botanist, and is illustrated in masterly fashion by John Busby's lively drawings.

268 pages, £16.00 net

T & A D POYSER

Eagle attacking ornithologist

On 21 June 1988, on the Isle of Lewis, I visited an occupied nest of a Golden Eagle. At 6.30 pm, during clear, dry weather, I approached the nest crag which this pair have used successfully in recent years, when I saw an adult eagle fly off an area in the upper centre of the rock. The bird flew across the cliff face and landed on a hilltop, perhaps 0.5 km from the nest crag. On approaching the crag, I could see a single large chick standing on a nest in the area from which the adult had flown. I walked round the side of the crag and scrambled up to a position about 100 m above the nest. At this point the adult bird appeared in front of me, at a distance of about 100 m, soaring above the crag. I scrambled down the steep heather and rock slope into the nest which I knew to be accessible from a previous visit in 1986. The eagle chick appeared to be about 6 weeks old and prey in the nest included the remains of a number of Fulmars. As I stood up after a close examination of the chick, I was struck a very hard blow on the back of my head, which knocked me down on to the nest beside the chick. I looked up and saw an adult eagle flying away from the nest area but within 50 m of it. I sat down at the back of the nest against the rock and pulled the chick close to me. I looked up every few seconds while I was ringing the chick and the adult bird soared past within 100 m several times. As I bent over to put on the ring, I noticed drops of blood dripping on to my jacket and binoculars. As I very quickly climbed back up the slope out of the nest, the eagle flew in close on two occasions but flew off again when I shouted loudly and waved my arms. During my descent to the foot of the crag the bird flew across to its perch on the adjacent hilltop and remained there while I left the area.

On returning about one hour later, to the house where I was staying, it was found that I had a gash perhaps 4 or 5 inches long, from the crown of my head down towards my neck. I also had a wound in my left ear and two puncture marks on my back between my shoulder blades. My woollen jersey and shirt had large rips in them above these punctures. These wounds would seem consistent with the eagle having attacked with both sets of talons outspread in the manner in which eagles attack prey.

BWP, Vol II, p.240, states that Golden Eagles are "usually quiet and retiring when disturbed at nest by man" and this has been my own experience throughout several hundred visits to many nests throughout Scotland.

On 21 June 1985 at another occupied nest, again on Lewis, an adult female eagle flew towards me but turned away at a distance of about 10 m and did not repeat this "attack". This is my only previous experience of a close encounter with an adult eagle. In his book, *The Ways of an Eagle,* Lea McNally describes an attack by an adult female eagle at its nest, from which a chick had newly fledged, when the bird flew at him with talons outstretched; this is the only other reference I can find to an attack on man by a wild eagle.

Dave Dick

This interesting note raises even more interesting questions. Will RSPB claim compensation from public funds for damage to their employee in the way crofters can seek compensation if they lose lambs to an eagle? If compensation is payable how much is an RSPB Investigations Officer worth? More serously anyone who gets near to nesting eagles should remember that under normal circumstances it is the observer who is liable to disturb the birds and a licence is essential.

Unusual headgear

Although it may be of no scientific value, I think it is so unusual as to be worth reporting that a Merlin landed on my head at about eight o'clock on Saturday evening, 2nd July. I was clad in what must be one of the oldest Barbour jackets in existence and wearing an old Army hat with a wide brim which I find useful because it keeps the rain off my spectacles. I had been standing motionless for about ten minutes, watching the mouth of a burn as the tide flooded over the bar to see whether there was any sign of sea trout or salmon entering on the evening tide.

Suddenly I felt a bird land on my head – there could be no other explanation for the sensation. Instinctively I raised my hands and felt feathers as the bird flew away in front of me, having approached from behind. It was a male Merlin; probably a yearling, I think, for its back was slate grey while its wings were slightly browner.

It did not appear unduly worried at mistaking a man for a tree stump or a fence post, for it flew off as if I had not been there, round the shoulder of the slope and out of sight. Has anyone else had a wild falcon land on them?

Captain D.E.P. George

This extraordinary event recalls the day in 1977 when Susan da Prato had a Sedge Warbler taken out of her hand by a Sparrowhawk cf. Scottish Birds 9: 381. In both cases the lack of noise and movement from the observer seems to have deceived the bird of prey which probably never realised it had made contact with a human being.

Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period April to June is covered here.*

Persistent easterly winds ensured a plentiful supply of migrants on the Scottish coast and islands. For once Fair Isle was out-shone by North Ronaldsay and the Isle of May, with both the latter producing first records for Britain in two Siberian species: **Pallas's Rosefinch** and **Daurian Redstart**. The rosefinch attracted hundreds of twitchers who spent a considerable amount of money in the islands, the redstart, unfortunately, died. Orkney in general surpassed Shetland in the degree or rarity of the long list of vagrants recorded there.

Single **White-billed Divers** remained off Whalsay and Gullane into April; another was in west Sutherland in June. The **Black-browed Albatross** failed to return to Hermaness after 16 summers. **Little Egrets** put in brief appearances at Loch of Spiggie and near Ayr, while a **Greater Flamingo** in superb condition which arrived in Shetland on 27 May could have been a genuine vagrant.

King Eider *Sam Alexander*

Four **Snow Geese** flew north over Barns Ness on 5 May and a single **Brent** was at Aberlady in June. Two drake **Mandarins** visited Loch Loyal in April, while male **King Eiders** were at 3 sites in Shetland and at Loch Fleet, with a female also in Shetland. Largo Bay held 5 **Surf Scoters** in April when 3 were still in Gosford Bay, and singles occurred off Dornoch and the Kyle of Tongue. A drake **Smew** stayed on Loch Ruthven into mid April and **Ruddy Ducks** visited North Ronaldsay and Gladhouse and Bavelaw Reservoirs.

Woodchat Shrike *Mike Ashley*

Two **Honey Buzzards** visited Orkney in May; two also arrived on Fair Isle where another succumbed to **Fulmar** oil in June. Several **Red Kites** were seen in early April. An immature **White-tailed Eagle** was in Shetland in June. **Marsh Harriers** were widely reported between late April and late May. A **Rough-legged Buzzard** remained in Shetland into April. Orkney produced a **Hobby** in May.

The only report of a **Spotted Crake** was from Ayrshire. Two **Cranes** visited Orkney, with singles in Lewis, at the Cameron Reservoir, Aberlady and Dowlaw. Barns Ness had a **Stone Curlew**.

A **Little Stint** visited Musselburgh with 3 at Aberlady where a **Temminck's Stint** and a **Curlew Sandpiper** also put in appearances. A **Spotted Redshank** was seen in Orkney, where 2 **Green Sandpipers** also appeared, with 3 others in Shetland. **Wood Sandpipers** were widely recorded.

A lone **Red-necked Phalarope** visited North Ronaldsay and a **Grey Phalarope** St. Abbs. Two **Pomarine Skuas** were seen off Shetland and 2 more off Fair Isle in May, while Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay had **Long-tailed Skuas** in June. Unusual gulls included a **Mediterranean Gull** at Musselburgh, a **Sabine's Gull** off Gullane and a scattering of **Icelands**. Terns included single **Roseates** on North Ronaldsay and Fair Isle, **Black Terns** on Barra and at Tyninghame; and a fine **White-winged Black Tern** in Orkney.

Turtle Doves were sighted in Shetland, Lewis and at Fochabers. What were probably 2 **Scops Owls** avoided identification in Shetland, where at least 3 **Snowy Owls** remain; **Snowy Owls** were also reported from Orkney and Aberdeenshire.

Hoy provided twitchers with the spectacle of a **Needle-tailed Swift** in late May and early June, while a **Bee-eater** in Sutherland was seen by few. There were several **Hoopoes** and **Wrynecks** were widespread. Fair Isle had a **Short-toed Lark** and North Ronaldsay produced Orkney's first **Tawny Pipit**. Fair Isle also produced a **Red-throated Pipit**, with others on Unst and the Isle of May. **Yellow Wagtails** included **Grey-headed, Blue-headed** and an **Ashy-headed** at Aberlady.

A fall on Fair Isle on 14 May included 55 **Bluethroats**, with a scattering elsewhere. In April **Black Redstarts** were scattered around the coast. Britain's first **Daurian Redstart** spent 28 and 29 April on the Isle of May.

Fair Isle had falls of up to 500 **Wheatears**. A good scattering of **Ring Ouzels** resulted in their breeding in Shetland for only the second time. 1500 **Fieldfares** were on Fair Isle on 20 April. Other reports from Fair Isle included 90 **Icelandic Redwings** on 7 April and a series of records of **Grasshopper Warblers** including a record spring count of 10 on 30 April.

The Isle of May saw a **Paddyfield Warbler** on 6 June, while Fair Isle had up to 5 **Marsh Warblers**, with others in Orkney and Shetland. Fair Isle had a total of 3 **Great Reed Warblers**. Single **Icterine Warblers** were seen on several of the Northern Isles. There was also a **Melodious Warbler** in Orkney. An influx of **Subalpine Warblers** began in late April. Orkney produced a much rarer **Sardinian Warbler** and a **Barred Warbler**. Single **Firecrests** were recorded at Fife Ness and St. Abbs.

Red-breasted Flycatchers appeared on Unst and North Ronaldsay, and Hoy produced a **Great Tit! Golden Orioles** were widely distributed. A large arrival of **Red-backed Shrikes** occurred in the Northern Isles in mid May. A **Lesser Grey Shrike** was at Dowlaw on 22 May and a **Great Grey Shrike** was at Aberlady. Dowlaw also held a **Woodchat Shrike** from 15 to 22 May and Fair Isle had 3 between 21 May and 27 June.

A **Rose-coloured Starling** appeared at Achfarry, Sutherland in June. North Ronaldsay provided Scotland's first **Spanish Sparrow** on 29 May. Several **Scarlet Rosefinches** were in Shetland and Orkney. These were followed by Britain's first **Pallas's Rosefinch** which remained on North Ronaldsay until at least mid July.

Lapland Buntings occurred in small numbers in the Northern Isles. Single **Ortolans** were seen in the North and Fair Isle also had a **Little Bunting**. A small influx of **Black-headed Buntings** involved single males on Fair Isle, at Dundonnel, Skye and at Irvine all between 4 and 13 June, which, coincidentally, was the day before our daughter **Shona Gail** also arrived!

Surf Scoter *D. Robertson*

STOP PRESS

Scotland's first ***Caspian Plover*** *put in a brief overnight stay in July at Aberlady, but managed to avoid all but a few very fortunate birders. The rest, however, were consoled by a female* ***King Eider!***

Pete Ellis

The 1988 Round Up

The winter of 1987-88 was mild and followed by a better than average spring. This undoubtedly led to high numbers of breeding birds and good breeding success. However it wasn't the whole story and, as always, some species and areas did not follow the general trend.

Dippers in trouble

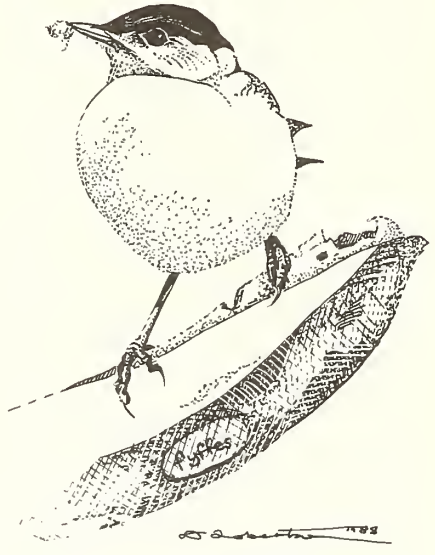
Heavy rain in early spring washed out some Dipper nests but other factors are still adversely affecting this species breeding success in several areas, notably on acid streams in SW Scotland. Not only are Dippers now much scarcer on some burns but there were several reports of only one or two chicks being reared per nest. Grey Wagtails had mixed fortunes, with reports of small clutches from Central Scotland and the South West, though it would be unwise to conclude that these birds were affected by the same factors as the Dippers.

Most waterfowl seem to have done well. The absence of cold, wet weather is always beneficial to ground nesting species. Mute Swans increased in the Lothians though several people thought Mallard numbers were down. Moorhen did well on several census plots but Mink were again quoted as severely affecting Moorhen in parts of the South East. Both Little and Great Crested Grebes did well in the Lothians. Preliminary indications are that Red-throated Divers have not had a good year on Shetland.

Good on the ground

Wader eggs and chicks also benefitted from the warm, dry spring. Most correspondents commented on a successful season for our common waders on both farmland and hill pasture. The main exception to this pattern was where predation either by humans or corvids was high. In Ayrshire James Brown reports trying to catch youths with "a pillowcase full of eggs". Twenty two of his 32 pairs of Lapwings were robbed by humans and another three by crows. In the Lammermuirs Lothian Ringing Group thought Golden Plover might be down a little. This sort of comment emphasises how little is known of the fortunes of relatively common, upland species and there is lots of scope for keen hill men – or women – to monitor our upland birds.

Red Grouse increased in the Lammermuirs but some Corncrakes had problems. On Canna the birds moved on as the dry conditions decimated their usual hay fields. Ringed Plovers crashed by over 50% at Aberlady Bay, possibly in response to the failure of the tern colony in which the plovers nest. Waders also seem to have done badly on some of the Northern Isles, possibly suffering increased predation by skuas.



Blackcap *Derek Robertson*

Well fed raptors

Most predators had a good season, especialy those owls and raptors that specialise in voles. Vole numbers were high in many parts of the country, especially the South West, where Barn, Tawny, Long and Short-eared Owls all did well. In Galloway Forest Park Barn Owl numbers in nest boxes jumped from eight to 30 pairs. All the owls laid big clutches earlier than usual and several pairs had second broods. One observer reported that hills which hardly saw a Short-eared Owl in previous years were now "alive with them".

Kestrels also had a good season in several parts of Scotland. Gordon Riddle reported one of the best years in Ayrshire since the study there began in 1972. Buzzards too did well both in the South West and the Highlands. Hen Harriers also seem to have done well though much better information on the larger raptors will appear in a later issue when the Scottish Raptor Groups produce their report.

A Merlin study in the Lammermuir Hills found that though numbers were high breeding success was relatively poor. This sort of information comes from people putting a lot of time into their birds but it is definitely time well spent.

Seabirds mixed fortunes

Yet again there were reports of poor breeding success in Scottish seabird colonies, mostly in the North and West. On Canna Manx Shearwaters and Kittiwakes did poorly though auks and large gulls did well. In Shetland preliminary reports were of another bad year for terns and Kittiwakes and also for skuas. Shortages of sand eels seem responsible and, in the case of skuas, there seems to be a knock on effect as the birds respond to fish shortages by turning more to other birds as a prey source. On Fair Isle the numbers of breeding terns was up on 1987 but few young fledged e.g. only two from 59 pairs of Common Terns. Auks have done better than the surface feeders though it is worrying to hear that Puffins in the big Hermaness colony seem to be doing badly this year. Fair Isle's Gannets increased by 40% to 430 pairs.

In the Firth of Forth seabird numbers are still high though Kittiwakes productivity was down at a monitoring site in Dunbar. Cormorants continue to increase in the inner Forth and Shags are still doing well on some islands, though it seems fewer pairs nested on the Isle of May. Some auk colonies may have stopped increasing – but they could hardly be expected to maintain the rate of increase of the last decade.

The Forth terns had their ups and downs. Aberlady Bay had a disastrous year but Little Terns were in record numbers at nearby Tyninghame and Common Terns in Leith Docks increased from 382 pairs in 1987 to 453 in 1988. Roseate Terns continued to hold their own on the RSPB's Inchmickery Reserve – 21 pairs is not a high number but it is considerably better than the two pairs of 1981!

We hope to present a fuller picture of the seabird situation in the next issue of *SBN*.

Songbirds with something to sing about

Back on land resident passerines, and near passerines such as woodpeckers, mostly came through the winter well. There were many reports of increases in Goldcrests, Wrens, Dunnocks and tits, notably the very cold-sensitive Long-tailed Tit. It was especially heartening to hear that two pairs of Stonechats were breeding in the Pentland Hills just outside Edinburgh. This species used to be a feature of upland and coastal areas with

gorse scrub in the Lothians but was wiped out by the hard winters of the late 70's and early 80's.

It was also good to get reports of increases in some seed eating species as agricultural changes have had a serious effect on birds such as the cardueline finches. However there will have to be a huge increase in numbers before birds like Linnets are back at their old levels. Reed Buntings maintained an increase in several plots but Corn Buntings seem even nearer extinction on many farms. This is the first year since moving to this address in 1974 that your editor has not heard a Corn Bunting sing. Crossbills and Siskins both did well, due to the heavy Sitka cone crop in their forest habitat.

Several summer visitors were up, notably Garden Warblers, and both flycatchers. However nest box studies of Pied Flycatchers by Henry Robb in Stirling/Perthshire reveal that, though numbers were up, productivity was down with smaller than average clutches, addled eggs and fewer young fledging than last year. Nightjars were still in low numbers on Arran but the Forestry Commission are, at last, doing some much needed habitat work.

One summer visitor that was present in much better numbers than for some years was the Sand Martin. Other trans – Saharan migrants that were affected by the Sahel drought, such as Common Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler, seemed to be holding their own with local variations. Some people thought there were fewer Redstarts, Willow Warblers and Blackcaps but other observers found the opposite! These variations demonstrate how vital it is to have even more people out in the field on census work, especially in the uplands.

THANKS to *Allan Brown, James Brown, Martin Cook, Roger Durman (a special mention as he had to make his observations with a leg in plaster!), Colin and Rosemary Edwards, Pete Ellis (RSPB and Shetland Ringing Group), Peter Gordon, Bryan Hickman, Isle of May Bird Observatory, P.J. Knowling, Ian Langford, Donnie Macdonald, Ian Poxton (Lothian Ringing Group), Nick Riddiford and Andrew Silcocks (F.I.B.O.T.), Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, David and Laura Robertson, David Sexton (RSPB Scotland), Geoff Shaw, Marion Shimeld, Bob Smith, Bob Swann, Derrick Warner.*

Apologies to anyone whose form came in too late to be acknowledged or whom I did not get in touch with. Anyone who is doing monitoring work and wants a form next year please get in touch.

Stan da Prato

Atlas impressions

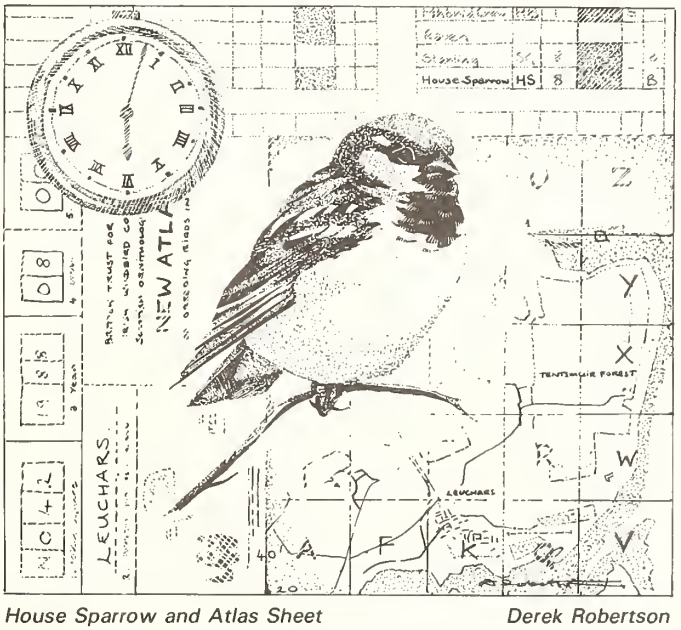
When you read this, fieldwork for the first season of the New Atlas will have been completed and the processing and preliminary analysis of the Scottish results should be well under way. As I write fieldwork for the first half of the season has just been completed and very soon I shall be out for the second half to record the Meadow Pipits I missed in the early part of the season. Well, it hasn't been quite as bad as that! Personally I've found fieldwork enjoyable and successful with a full complement of Highland birds on my Atlas tick list. Fortunately the weather has been favourable in April and May. Let's hope it continued to be so in June and July *(it was raining when this was edited on 2 July)*.

A gratifying part of fieldwork has been confirming that the methods really are quite simple despite six pages of instructions. It becomes quite a challenge compiling a list of species for each new tetrad surveyed. I've found some tetrads to be most rewarding with over thirty species recorded in one hour. One local rep. has logged over 40 species in a one hour tetrad visit – I wonder what the record is? Other tetrads have been pretty poor – in several I've recorded only two species – always including Meadow Pipit, however! I've had some odd tetrads too, such as one in a Key Square in Perthshire, in which I recorded only Red Grouse, Golden Plover, Skylark and (inevitably) Meadow Pipit in my one hour visit while in the ten minute point count the only thing I had for company was a solitary Peregrine.

As I have been devoting my attention primarily to Key Squares I've been making lots of point counts. These have been quite instructive as far as tetrad surveying is concerned. Point counts involve remaining stationary for ten minutes and I've found that it's also a good idea during one's one or two hour tetrad visit just to sit down for five minutes or so and listen. It's surprising how successful this can be for picking up an extra one or two species – especially if it's windy. It can sometimes be a struggle to visit in one hour all parts of a tetrad which one wants to, but it should be manageable to cover most of a tetrad in the two hours total time available. The possibility that some species in a tetrad might be missed is not such a bad thing. Remember that to a large extent we require this to be the case in order to measure the relative abundance of the species. It is important, however, that observations of those species missed in timed tetrad visits are submitted as supplementary records (also casual records) for 10 kilometre squares to your local rep. We need these records if distributional maps are to be complete. This should not be a problem with the Meadow Pipit.

There have been some interesting reports from the early part of the season. David Jardine has noted in Argyll that there may be interesting differences in the altitudinal distributions of chats. Afforestation appears to have helped Siskins. Records of Corncrakes are, as expected, few and far between. We should expect to see Ruddy Duck represented on a breeding map north of the border. A Reed Warbler has been seen singing in Edinburgh. There are signs that divers, especially Red-throated, are doing well. We may be able to compare breeding habitat requirements of Red-throated and Black-throated Divers. Meadow Pipits are not confined to meadows. These are only preliminary impressions, however, and nothing definite can be stated yet. Watch out for a full report on the first season's fieldwork later.

Jim Reid



House Sparrow and Atlas Sheet *Derek Robertson*

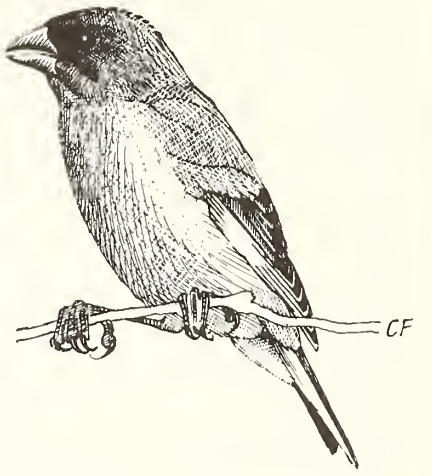
The Clyde Tetrad Atlas

Atlas work has been one of the most popular forms of ornithological survey work since the BTO's National Atlas project of 1968-72. Since then a number of English ornithological societies have carried out detailed surveys based on 2km × 2km squares known as tetrads. The Clyde Atlas project, which has just completed its fourth season, is the first to use this scale in Scotland. As a tetrad atlas is more detailed than the 10km square grid used in the national atlas, it is potentially even more valuable for conservation. The results of atlas work, along with other population and habitat surveys, will give us the most complete picture of the status and distribution of Clyde birds to date. It is a mammoth task, programmed to run for six seasons to 1990, and organised by a team of five local organisers.

Clyde habitats

The Inner Clyde Area has a wide variety of habitats, giving interesting bird distribution patterns. It is unique in that it is the only ornithological recording area to give a cross section from the Highlands, across the Central Lowlands, to the Southern Uplands. High ground is well represented with Loch Lomondside incorporating ten peaks over 3000 feet, the lower Campsie Fells, Kilpatrick Hills and West Renfrew Heights and the Southern Uplands. Woodlands range from a miniature remnant of Caledonian pine in Glen Falloch through extensive conifer plantations and mixed policy woodlands to the semi-natural oakwoods of Loch Lomond and ancient deciduous woods of the mid-Clyde valley. Similar diversity is to be found on farmland and wetlands, notable sites among the latter including Loch Lomond and Endrick Mouth NNR, the upper Kelvin valley marshes, Lochwinnoch and the Clyde valley.

Built-up areas are very much a feature of the central belt; not surprising as the area holds around 40% of Scotland's population. These areas are not without their birds, Glasgow being noted for its number of parks. Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Kingfisher and Meadow Pipit have bred well within the city boundary, with Spotted Flycatcher and Mistle Thrush amongst the most obvious parkland birds. Riparian habitats range from upland streams to the slow-flowing Clyde in its lower reaches, and a healthy and diverse avifauna is to be found along these waterways. Two canals feature, the Forth and Clyde from Bowling near the Erskine Bridge to Castlecary, and two remnants of the Monkland Canal at Coatbridge. Both are largely disused and have become havens for waterside birds. The coast, though without seabird colonies, supports a variety of species utilising sites from the innter estuary to the Gare Loch and Loch Long, and the rocky west Renfrewshire coast.

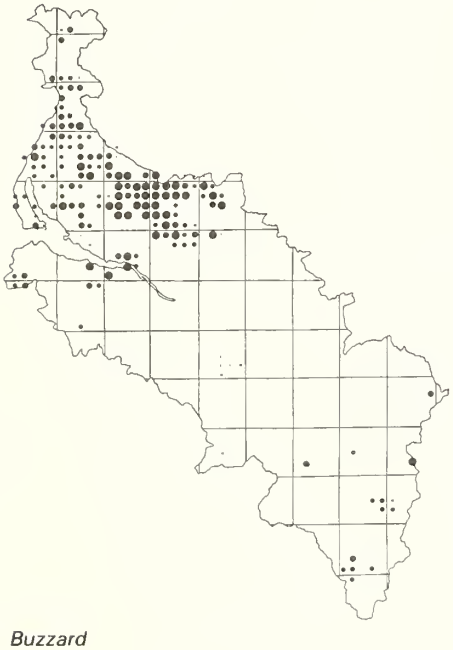


Greenfinch *C. Fisher*

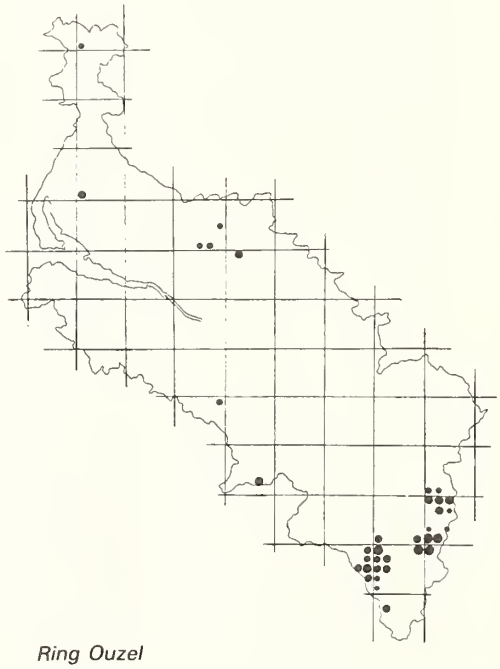
Methods

The methodology is similar to that used in the last National Atlas and is in fact that agreed by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee and adopted by the BTO for future British projects. It includes the category A for species observed in the breeding season but not breeding. This allows us to map the distribution of summering, non-breeding species, and the ranges of widely-foraging species such as Swift and Lesser Black-backed Gull. Our detailed but straightforward instructions include notes on potential problem species and recording period restrictions, as well as guidance on tetrad identification and species recording codes.

Coverage is monitored carefully by the local organisers to try and achieve even coverage, rather than patchy intensive coverage which has been a failing of some published atlases. The degree of coverage is based on the local organisers' assessment of species expected from personal knowledge of their areas. To accompany the detailed distribution maps we require data on the abundance of the species. We decided that the most practical way of gathering information on bird populations was by a combined programme of species and habitat surveys. This should give us valuable information on total populations of a variety of species and data on the importance of breeding sites for conservation purposes. This apprach has covered wetlands, uplands, selected woodlands and species such as gulls, Sand Martin, Dipper and Rook.

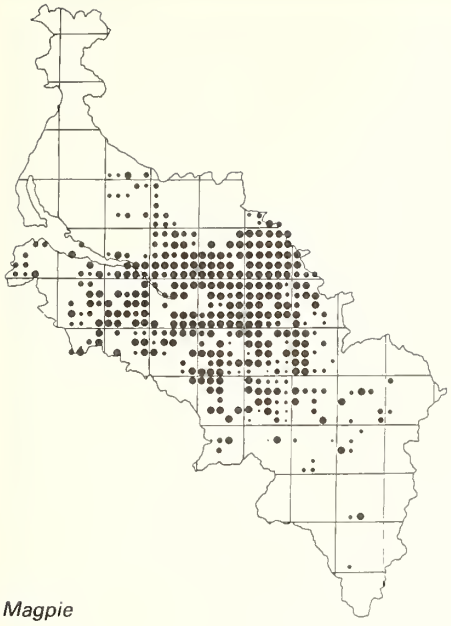


Buzzard

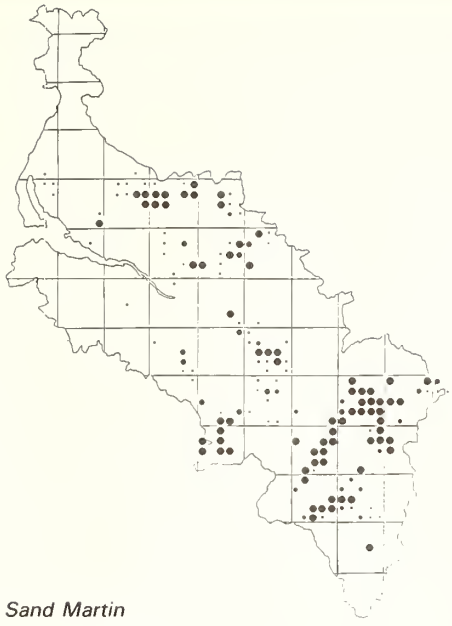


Ring Ouzel

Members interested in further field seasons should contact Alan Wood at 47 Kilbowie Road, South Carbrain, Cumbernauld G67 2PZ for the Clyde area, and in the neighbouring regions Mike Leven, 13 Henderson Row, Edinburgh for Lothian and Ray Murray and Rob Robertson, 143 Eskhill, Penicuik, Midlothian for borders.



Magpie



Sand Martin

Results so far

Around 100 observers have participated so far and when all 1988 records are in we expect to have records from all 1,217 tetrads which fall within the recording area. There remains a lot to be done, however, as many species and tetrads are under recorded, and much upgrading of breeding evidence is required.

Over 125 species have been recorded breeding, including, to our great surprise, Golden Oriole in 1985, and many more have been recorded as non-breeders. The maps have been fascinating as they evolve, showing aspects of distribution not previously realised. Ring Ouzel is largely confined to steep sided heathery valleys in the Southern Uplands, while the Buzzard has its stronghold in well wooded Loch Lomondside. The Magpie is generally absent from both these areas, but is found in some numbers in the central belt. Readers will perhaps be surprised at the scarcity of species such as Great Spotted Woodpecker and Long-tailed Tit, while Black-headed Gull and Ring Ouzel were found to be more numerous than expected in Clydesdale District, an area very poorly known before the atlas project.

With improved and wider coverage of the area, it is worrying to find that some species are at a very low level. Barn Owl, Yellow Wagtail and Willow Tit are proving to be very scarce, while Corn Bunting is possibly extinct. There are brighter aspects, however; the importance of the inner Clyde's populations of Water Rails and Kingfishers is being documented, along with the nationally important breeding waders in the upper valleys. The survey of wetlands, timed to coincide with a similar project in Lothian Region, highlights the significance of some water bird populations. Inner Clyde held 134 pairs of Little Grebe, with 60-63 pairs in Lothian and an estimated 30-40 pairs in Borders. These areas cover more than a third of the range of this species in Scotland, which indicates a national population of around 700 pairs. Many species thought to be scarce are in fact more numerous than the "common" Little Grebe.

Sand Martins were surveyed between mid-June and mid-July 1987, and as well as producing a comprehensive distribution map, a wealth of records of other riparian species were collected for the atlas. A total of 3,483 Sand Martin burrows was recorded in 116 colonies; 95 of these, containing 1,826 pairs, were in natural sites. The distribution of colonies follows the major river valleys, especially the Endrick, Avon, Douglas and upper Clyde. There was an absence of Sand Martins in Renfrewshire despite available habitat, and few in west Dumbartonshire due to lack of habitat. It has been said that the British population is at present at a level of around 10% of its peak in the 1960's. If this was true for the Inner Clyde Area, it would then have held a population of around 35,000 pairs! This seems high, so perhaps our Sand Martins are not doing so badly as elsewhere?

The habit spreads

Lothian and Borders branches launched a joint atlas project based on the same methodology this spring. This will give a comparable picture of bird distribution in south-east Scotland, and, with the Clyde atlas will cover over half of southern Scotland. This is one way forward for SOC fieldwork, with inter-branch co-operation on local projects complementing projects initiated nationally.

Alan D. Wood

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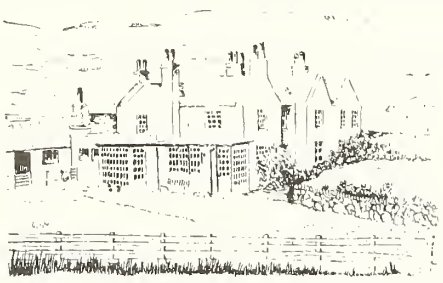

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist — almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

There are no day-trippers, no caravanners, etc., but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating and private facilities). Drive on-off car and passenger ferry ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Dinner, accommodation and breakfast from £30.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three luxury self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £65.00 weekly. Also special demi-pension arrangements for Field Study parties. Details on request.

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New status for the Solway

In June the Nature Conservancy Council notified the Upper Solway Flats and Marshes as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Eleven previously existing SSSIs and the adjacent mudflats have been combined into one larger site. This involves the South West Region of NCC in Scotland and the North West Region in England. Of the eleven previously existing SSSIs seven are on the Scottish side. They are: Southerness Coast; Carse Bay, Kirkconnell Merse; Caerlaverock; Priestside Bank; Inner Solway (Waterfoot to Sarkfoot); and the Flooders. Within the enlarged SSSI in Scotland of 19,000 hectares some 92% comprises intertidal sand and mudflats. The total proposed SSSI covering both Scottish and English areas is approximately 30,000 hectares.

The intertidal mudflats and marshes of the Solway form one of the largest continuous areas of such habitat in Britain, exceeded only by Morecambe Bay and the Wash. The Solway is one of the most important estuaries in Britain for wintering birds. It regularly supports 85,000 waders and 29,000 wildfowl. Twenty species occur in numbers of national or international significance; indeed the entire Spitzbergen population of Barnacle Geese winters on the Solway. In addition important populations of breeding birds, the rare Natterjack Toad (at its northernmost limit in Britain) and rare and uncommon plants occur. The extensive saltmarshes are themselves of national importance. There are notable geological features and exposures showing the history of sea level changes since the last Ice Age.

During the year prior to notification NCC contacted all the owners and occupiers involved, 90 on the Scottish side. This was done on an individual basis to discuss their existing management of the site. SSSI notification means that NCC will be consulted over any proposed changes in management that might affect nature conservation. It does not affect the rights of the general public to access or recreation on the foreshore; or for wildfowling, haaf-netting (a traditional type of fishing carried out on the Solway); or bait digging (in Scotland). Overall NCC believes the SSSI should have little effect on traditional land management. In fact some activities such as grazing on saltmarshes are vital to maintain the interest of the site.

Because of the international importance of the estuary it is proposed to designate the Solway as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention; and as a Special Protection Area under the EEC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

Pigeon and Peregrine

Returning from the Isle of May on 24 April 1988, six members of the Lothian Ringing Group spotted a feral/racing pigeon high in the sky, being pursued in level flight by a male Peregrine. Both birds were heading towards the boat, so we expected to have an even better view in the next few seconds. As they came nearer it was obvious that neither bird was gaining on the other. Just before coming overhead the pigeon dived towards the boat and landed by the cabin. The skipper's mate came out of the cabin, the pigeon lifted off and flew back towards the Fife coast, appearing no worse for its adventure. By this time the Peregrine was nowhere to be seen. The pigeon probably didn't appreciate its luck as the boat was running late!

Ian Langford

Peregrine *Don Smith*

Harriers enliven geology

The chance to see a family of Hen Harriers at close range added to the interest of a new interpretive facility in Easter Ross created by the Forestry Commission with help from the Nature Conservancy Council. A car park, viewing point and display panel have been put in at Strathrory on the A836 between Alness and Bonar Bridge, overlooking probably the best example in the Highlands of glacial meltwater channels. The channels were formed towards the end of the last ice age by rivers which carried the melting water from the glaciers. When the ice finally thawed it left the dry channels seen on the hillside today.

Preparations for the opening of the view point revealed that a pair of Hen Harriers were nesting in a plainly visible location nearby. The opening of the area to the public was delayed to allow the chicks to hatch in the first week of June. Advice was sought from the RSPB and NCC who felt that creating a viewing point for the public would be unlikely to cause undue disturbance. The Forestry Commission sited a hide in the car park from which the public could view the Harriers through a fixed telescope with appropriate staff in attendance.

In Search of the Osprey

The New Galloway Branch were delighted that their May weekend in Speyside attracted members from a wide area, not only from Kirkcudbrightshire and Dumfriesshire but from as far distant as Harrogate and South Shields, making up a party of eighteen. Near perfect weather and a local expert guide, who was also host to a very welcome tea-party on Sunday afternoon, added up to a very successful visit with over 93 species sighted.

One highlight, of course, was the Osprey. From the RSPB hide there was an excellent view of the actual change over from male to female on the nest. Another was the sight of a female Goldeneye with eleven ducklings, whilst overhead three Ospreys flew against a perfect blue sky. There were a few who claimed that to be watching two pairs of Slavonian Grebe at 9.30 pm on a balmy summer evening was idyllic, only to be challenged next morning by the rest of the group who claimed that 9.30 am must be better!

Crested Tits, Crossbills, Ptarmigan, Dotterel, Greenshanks, all high on the list of priorities, were observed. Unfortunately Golden Eagle proved to be a trifle more elusive but a few members did see one flying in the far distance.

Apart from a farewell gathering on Sunday night the actual bird watching ended with the visitor from Harrogate, no stranger to the area, giving an energetic, albeit elegant, demonstration of how to successfully climb a deer fence. The party all agreed that it was a most enjoyable weekend and look forward to a return visit.

Christine Cook

Side rolling display of the Black-throated Diver

On 3 June 1987, whilst walking near a large loch in Sutherland, I observed a pair of Black-throated Divers. One bird (A) rolled onto its left side, exposing its white belly to its partner (B) and turned its head looking down the length of its body. Meanwhile, (B) swam towards (A) until they were c. 0.5m apart and then (A) rolled into its normal swimming position. The birds swam apart and repeated the behaviour but with the roles reversed – (A) approached (B) which was on its side. On two occasions the side roll continued until the bird was on its back with both legs exposed. At the end of this behavour both birds beat their wings, splashing the water and side rolled together; on one occasion one bird did a complete roll.

This display does not seem to have been recorded before. ***Neil Redgate***

This seems to be an extension of the splash diving behaviour mentioned in BWP Vol 1 p53.

Summering Shorebirds in the Moray Basin

Regular co-ordinated counts have been made in the Moray Basin to ascertain the numbers of shorebirds using the basin in mid-winter (see *SBN* No.3 p.6). Very few ornithologists visit the estuaries during the summer so our knowledge of what birds were on the firths at that time of year was very hazy. Many species of waders do not breed in their first year of life nd therefore spend the summer in their wintering areas. We were keen to find out how many of these birds summered in the Moray Basin. The count, involving 30 observers, took place on 5 June 1988. The whole Moray Basin from Brora to Findhorn Bay was covered along with the rocky shores between Burghead and Buckie which are dealt with separately.

The Waders

In all 4439 waders were counted, representing about 12% of the average peak wintering population. The main species involved were Oystercatcher, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew. The most important parts of the Basin were the Inner Moray Firth where 1462 waders were counted with a large concentration around Whiteness Head, followed by Findhorn Bay and the Culbin/Nairn Bars with 1042 waders. These areas held all the Knot and Godwit, 48% of the Curlew and 35% of the Oystercatcher.

Summer wader numbers in the Moray Basin June 1988

	June 88	rank June 88	rank mid winter
Oystercatcher	2452	1	1
Lapwing	155	5	7
Ringed Plover	84	6	9
Turnstone	10	9	8
Curlew	351	4	5
Bar-tailed Godwit	500	3	4
Redshank	57	7	3
Knot	785	2	6
Dunlin	32	8	2

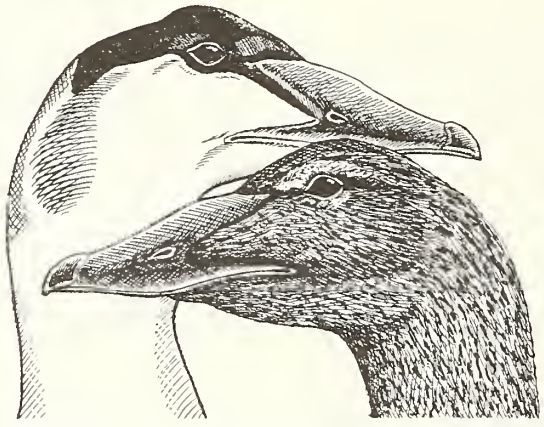
One Grey Plover, 6 Common Sandpiper, 6 Redshank were also counted. Mid winter ranking is based on average peak counts 1985-88.

The Waterfowl

3707 adult ducks were located. Three species dominated, two of which, Eider and Shelduck, have large breeding populations in the Basin. Most of the Eiders (92%) were found in the north around Loch Fleet and the Dornoch Firth. The Shelduck were more dispersed but with large concentrations in Munlochy Bay (194) and Nigg Bay (184). The large numbers of Mallard mainly comprised males in eclipse plumage with the largest concentration (242) at Ness Mouth, Inverness. The 238 Mute Swans were mostly non-breeders and mainly located on the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths. The 340 Canada Geese were mostly on the Beauly Firth where there is a well documented moulting flock.

Wildfowl numbers in the Moray Basin June 1988

Mute Swan	238
Canada Goose	340
Pink-footed Goose	3
Greylag Goose	63
Shelduck	1146
Wigeon	28
Teal	36
Mallard	1146
Tufted Duck	35
Eider	1108
Goldeneye	9
Red-breasted Merganser	102
Goosander	97



Eider Pair *D. Mitchell*

Origins

Over 90% of the Knot and Godwit located were young 'brown' birds, with very few 'red' adults being observed. These birds had obviously decided to summer locally rather than head back towards their breeding grounds. The Oystercatchers were a combination of local breeders and non-breeding adults and immatures. A cannon net catch of 134 summering Oystercatchers at Ft. George on 24 May 1986 showed that 41% were adults, 20% were two and three year old birds and 39% one year old birds. The Curlew were also probably a combination of young birds and non-breeding adults. Four of the Curlew had been dyed in the basin earlier in the winter suggesting they were our own wintering birds that had remained to summer. Compared to the winter situation Dunlin and Redshank had almost disappeared. About half the Redshank found were probably local breeders, whilst the few Dunlin were all actively feeding birds in full summer plumage and probably represented the tail end of the spring migration of high arctic breeders. Ringed Plover were proportionately more common in summer than winter, most however, were from the local breeding population. There was no significant difference in the ranking of sites used by waders in mid-winter and summer so that the sites that held the largest numbers in winter also held the largest number in summer. However the Inner Moray held proportionately more in summer than expected, and the Cromarty and Beauly proportionately fewer than expected.

The rocky shores held very few birds. Of the 140 waders counted two species dominated: Oystercatchers (88) and Ringed Plover (40).

R.L. Swann

Wader numbers on different sites within the basin

	Average winter count*	rank	Summer count	rank
Brora-Embo	3161	5	473	5
Dornoch Firth	5435	4	637	4
Cromarty Firth	7608	2	682	3
Beauly Firth	1621	6	143	6
Inner Moray	7229	3	1462	1
Bars & Findhorn	8277	1	1042	2

* based on average January count (1985-88)

Photo Spot

Bullfinch *B.S. Turner*

Members are reminded that entries for the 1988 Photo Competition should be sent to Regent Terrace by the end of September. See over page.

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SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 October for the December number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries - and suggestions - will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in *SB 14(1)*.

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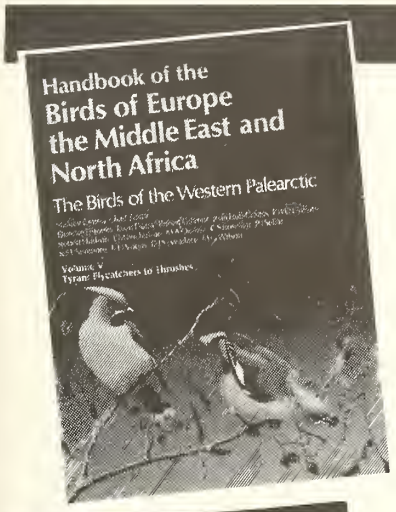

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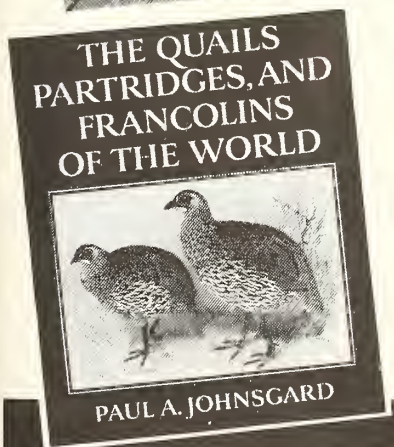

The Quails, Partridges, and Francolins of the World

Paul A. Johnsgard

This unrivalled companion volume to the author's highly successful *Pheasants of the World* describes three times as many species. 127 beautiful colour plates—mostly by Henry Jones—illustrate all of the species in the group. The descriptions cover biology, ecology, development, behaviour, taxonomy, and zoogeographic aspects.

0 19 857193 3, 288 pp., illus., June 1988 £47.50

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

SOC Notices

1988 Annual Raffle

Members were advised in *SBN: 10* that the Borders Branch had been asked to arrange this year's raffle. Tickets, which are enclosed with this issue, will be on sale at all Branches in September and October, and at the Conference. The draw will be made after the speeches at the annual dinner.

Following the great success of the 1987 raffle, when we raised over £950 net, our target is to net over £1000 this time. We are sure that the goodwill of all members will easily beat this figure, but we are not complacent! To help us achieve our target we would like to raise the £100 first prize by donation rather than by ticket sales. Last year half the first prize was donated, but we would hope that a number of members might consider donating £10 or more directly for this prize. If more is received it would be put towards other costs – printing, postage or the license fee. Any such donation should be sent direct to the promotor, Alastair Peirse-Duncombe, whose address is on each ticket, and it will be acknowledged personally.

A final thought. If only half our members bought one book each, we would achieve our target. Surely this is not too much to hope for!

Borders Branch Committee

A.G. Stewart

The death of Graham Stewart at the end of May came as a sad blow to ornithologists in Ayrshire and beyond, and his contribution throughout the years will always be remembered.

A founder member of Ayrshire S.O.C. Branch, and long-standing committee member culminating in his period as Chairman from 1971-1974; Graham also served as B.T.O. representative for many years and was responsible for organising the annual Wildfowl Trust count in Ayrshire. His interests and involvement in wildlife conservation extended to the Scottish Wildlife Trust where he was a long-serving member of Council, and Honorary Vice-President of the Ayrshire Branch.

His professional training and expertise as an aircraft controller came through in his efficient organisational ability which was combined with a delightful sense of humour, and a genuine interest in bird life.

Graham will be sadly missed in Ayrshire, and we extend our deepest sympathy to Helen and his family.

J.K.R. Melrose

The Major Returns

John Davies has decided to go on a teacher training course starting this autumn. We wish him well in his new career. Alastair Peirse-Duncombe has generously stepped into the breach as Acting Secretary on a part-time basis until a new Secretary can be appointed. Management Committee will also be helping out. **If anyone is interested in the post they should write to the President, c/o 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.**

Miss Pat Webster has rejoined the staff as Membership Secretary, replacing Kate Donaghy, who left in May. Pat was SOC Membership Secretary from 1983 to 1985. More recently she has been part-time membership secretary for the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust. We are delighted to welcome her back.

New Subscription Rates 1989

Subscriptions at the new rates for 1989 are due for renewal on 1st October. A Membership Renewal Slip is enclosed with this issue of *SBN*. Please complete the slip and return it with your remittance, if applicable, to the Membership Secretary at the SOC as soon as possible. And, please, if you don't already do so, seriously consider paying by Banker's Order and Covenanting your subscription as well. These save you and the Club time and money.

Annual Conference 1988

This year's Annual Conference is back at the Marine Hotel, North Berwick from Friday 28 to Sunday 30 October. The theme of the conference is Scottish Seabirds. The conference programme and booking form is enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

1988 Photo Competition

Entries which must be of wild birds taken in Scotland on colour slides or black and white prints should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace by the end of September. Please mark your entries Photo Comp and make sure your name and address are on them.

Winter Field Trips 1988/89

Details of this autumn's and winter's branch field trips are printed on a separate sheet enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

Change of Strathclyde Recorder

From 1 July 1988 the recorder for Strathclyde (Argyll) is **Mike Madders, Smithy Cottage, Lochdon, Craignure, Mull, Argyll PA64 6AP.**

British Birds

The independent monthly magazine for birdwatchers is again available at the special concessionary rate for SOC members. The enclosed leaflet gives details.

Small Ads

BIRD JOURNAL back numbers supplied D. Morgan, Whitmore, Umberleigh, Devon.

LOTHIAN BIRD REPORT 1987. £3.55 from Liz Leven, 13 Henderson Row, Edinburgh.

1988 Scottish Ringers Conference

The Annual Scottish Ringers Conference will this year be hosted by Clyde Ringing Group and returns to the same excellent venue as last year – the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar, on 19/20 November 1988. The conference is priced at £27.00 for the Saturday and Sunday sessions or £34.00 for those who wish to stay overnight on Friday. A day visit costs £8.00 and includes coffee and lunch. Scottish Ringers will receive full details before November, but others wishing to attend should contact Clyde Ringing Group's Secretary **Mrs Sheila Russell at Clober Farm, Milngavie, by Glasgow G62 7HW enclosing an SAE.**

Fair Isle

Awards are made annually from the John Harrison Memorial Fund which is administered by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, and the Ian Pitman Scholarship Fund, administered by the National Trust for Scotland. These are given to help young people with the cost of travel and their stay at the Observatory; they must be between the ages of 15 and 21 when they go to Fair Isle. In recent years some 6/8 awards of between £60 and £100 each have been made each year.

Successful applicants are responsible for making their own travel arrangements, and booking at the Observatory where they are required to stay for a minimum of one week. Information about the Observatory, and activities of work which might be undertaken during their stay, must be obtained direct from the Warden or his wife on Fair Isle. Application forms can be obtained respectively from the **Hon. Secretary, J.H.M.F., 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, or the **Hon. Secretary, Ian Pitman Scholarships Fund, N.T.S., 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4DU. They must be returned no later than 31 October for consideration in mid December.**

Snow field feeding in birds

Snow fields and even small patches of late snow in arctic and alpine situations frequently attract feeding birds for a variety of reasons. I am hoping to draft a review of this phenomenon and would be very pleased to receive unusual observations of any species feeding on the surface of snow in lowland/upland/arctic/temperate settings. Details of the numbers and species of birds involved, any insight into the possible food items involved and locality, habitat, circumstances would be appreciated. Any accounts of birds which are clearly *choosing* to feed on snow in preference to foraging elsewhere would be especially interesting. Please send observations from Britain and Ireland or overseas to: **Tony Fox, The Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT.**

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook and Diary 1989

Members of the SOC may purchase the yearbook at 20% off the full price (ie. £7.00 instead of £8.75) and post free if they order direct from the publishers. **Buckingham Press, Freepost MK 790, Buckingham MK18 1YP.** For members' convenience a leaflet which includes an order form at this special price is being distributed with this issue.

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Birds

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1988 No. 12
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Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Ian Andrews

Scotland's Newest Bird Observatory

For years seaweed-eating sheep were North Ronaldsay's main attraction, but now this northernmost Orkney island has made headline news thanks to hedgehogs and a visit by a Pallas's Rosefinch. The Observatory's founder and island doctor Kevin Woodbridge writes on the establishment of Scotland's recently fledged Bird Observatory – exciting news for birdwatchers and island enthusiasts alike.

Scotland's third and youngest bird observatory is set to become firmly established on the ornithological scene. North Ronaldsay has long been known to the cognoscenti as an excellent migration site, and the idea for an observatory had been mooted as early as the 1960's. However it was not until 1985 that positive moves were made towards developing the observatory, and in January 1987 formal accreditation was awarded by the Bird Observatories Council.

The final trigger for the establishment of the observatory was the tragic deaths of Adrian and Wendy Cawthorne, who had become regular autumn visitors to the island. Adrian, a Scientific Officer with the British Trust for Ornithology, died in January 1985 at the tragically early age of twenty-nine. An appeal fund was set up by his friends and colleagues with the object of promoting an observatory on North Ronaldsay, and Wendy his widow became its first Chairperson. Wendy herself died on the night of the second meeting of the fund's trustees in May 1986, at the age of thirty. The trust was renamed the Adrian and Wendy Cawthorne Appeal Fund and is still actively engaged in fund raising.

Much interest has been aroused by the activities of the observatory during this period, not least the events of summer 1986 when it became obvious that the introduced hedgehogs were adversely affecting the success of ground nesting birds, and scores were deported by air to new homes (mainly SWT reserves) on the Scottish mainland. This story not only made the national news in Britain, but was broadcast worldwide from Canada to Tasmania to Japan! Of course rarities always attract attention, the Pine Buntings and Olive-backed Pipits in 1987 sent ripples of interest through birding circles, spring 88 produced a series of exciting records, the first Scottish Spanish Sparrow in May created waves but the *tsunami* came about with the observatory's first 'first' in the form of a Pallas's Rosefinch. This

created Orkney's first major twitch, with over two hundred visitors in a three day period.

Though these glamorous events are welcome and enjoyable, the basic question of what the objectives of a new observatory should be had to be addressed. This was particularly relevant both because of the proximity of the island to Fair Isle and the general decline in the fortunes of observatories and migration studies in favour of other fields of study. The Fair Isle worry has proved groundless: it is clear that the islands are complementary and contrasting, the habitats are completely different and passage numbers, particularly of seabirds and waders, quite startlingly different. Fair Isle retains an uncanny attraction for passerine vagrants which is unlikely ever to be matched on North Ronaldsay. This already raises interesting questions worthy of further study.

The breakthrough regarding migration studies must really be attributed to Adrian Cawthorne who encouraged computerisation of the data to be collected. Observatories collect enormous amounts of data on a daily basis, but, when recorded on a paper based system, analysis in any depth becomes a monumental and highly time consuming task. Since 1985, all census and ringing data on North Ronaldsay has been computerised, and the advantages are already apparent. Standard analyses such as rolling ten day averages can be applied to all species for year to year comparisons, population age/sex structures from ringing samples related to migration timing, weather data etc. The potential is enormous at the purely local level, but even greater when it is considered that with current technology all observatories could be linked to a central database. Moves towards this goal are already progressing. A mainframe located in Nethy Bridge is available, the Bird Observatories Council is promoting the networking of British observatories to this through the public data network and it is hoped to extend the network to the continent once a working system has been established.

Heady stuff and exciting times! But back to practical realities on North Ronaldsay. The observatory is located in a modern, energy conserving building heated entirely by solar and wind energy. This is subject to continued monitoring by Strathclyde University. In contrast, the main dormitory accommodation is located in an annexed old croft house which, to be generous, can only be described as basic. Major renovation is needed to bring the accommodation up to a good standard for visitors and to provide rooms for the wardens. With the help of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, the present steering committee of islanders, local naturalists, Spike Milligan and other public figures intend shortly to become a charitable trust, and something of the order of £50,000 will need to be raised to establish the facility permanently.

We hope to continue to provide inexpensive accommodation for visitors and operate the observatory to the mutual advantage of North Ronaldsay, ornithology and environmental studies in general. Any help and support from books, beds, practical help or donations to the appeal fund is desperately needed. Above all, why not come and see for yourself? Enquiries about visiting and the friends of the NRBO scheme should be addressed to the **Warden, North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory, Orkney KW17 2BE.**

NCC to buy Isle of May

Over the past year there has been growing concern for the future of the Isle of May amid press speculation that the island might be put on the open market by the Northern Lighthouse Board.

The island attained recognition as a bird migration locus by the Misses Baxter and Rintoul through their pioneer work between 1920 and 1924. About ten years later George Waterston and Frank Elder made their first of many trips and, in 1934, a team consisting of the latter, Eric Watson, W B Alexander and Ron Lockley built the first of the island's four Heligoland traps, thereby establishing Britain's second, and Scotland's first, Bird Observatory. The Observatory records were interrupted by the war years 1939-45, but otherwise have continued right up to the present, while its base switched from the Old Lookout to the Low Light. In 1956 the Nature Conservancy signed a 99-year Nature Reserve Agreement with the Northern Lighthouse Board and the island formally became a National Nature Reserve. Joe Eggeling's book on the natural history and life on the island was published in 1960, and has been reprinted with an update on birds to 1974 in 1985.

During the past 20 years a considerable amount of scientific research has been encouraged by the Nature Conservancy Council. BTO members will be familiar with a series of papers on gulls by John Coulson and other workers from Durham University and studies, particularly of auks, by Mike Harris of ITE. Current research is primarily focussed on long-term seabird monitoring, feeding and breeding ecology of seabirds, changes in the island's House Mice genetics and studies on Grey Seals. The island has also attained recognition as an important breeding seabird station. At present there are about 14,000 pairs of breeding Puffins; 7,600 pairs of Kittiwake; 11,000 pairs of Guillemot; 1,200 pairs of Razorbill and up to 1,900 pairs of Shag. Recently Common and Arctic Terns have re-established a breeding colony after a 25 year gap.

The Grey Seal colony, formerly producing a dozen pups a year, has expaned greatly over the past decade with a large influx from the Farnes and currently has an annual pup production of around 900. Bird Observatory work continues unabated with two new birds species recorded in the spring of this year; Daurian Redstart and Paddyfield Warbler.

Following the news that the lighthouse is to become fully automated (completion due in 1989) fears had been voiced about the future ownership of the island and the implication for continued public access, research work and the Observatory. Happily the continuation of the island's present use has been assured following the announcement that the NCC has been given approval by the Department of the Environment to purchase the island from the Lighthouse Board.

NCC hope to improve the accommodation for staff and research workers and in due course it is expected that some interpretive and limited visitor facilities will be provided. Two summer contract wardens will be appointed: any interested SOC members should contact **Peter Kinnear, NCC, 46 Crossgate, Cupar, Fife KY15 5HS (0334 54038).**

Low Light, Isle of May *Derek Robertson*

Progress at Middlebank

It is now nearly two years since the SSPCA's Oiled Bird Cleaning Centre at Middlebank Farm, near Inverkeithing, opened its doors. SBN reported how the new centre was immediately in action dealing with hundreds of seabirds oiled in the Dornoch Firth. Recently we returned to Fife to see how the Centre had developed.

One piece of news was very welcome; no oil spills resulting in large scale casualties occurred in 1988. That does not mean that the staff – now consisting of two as volunteer Darroch Donald has joined Sandra Hogben full time – have been able to relax. Sandra tells us she has had one week off since the Centre opened. Even when oil victims have been scarce other casualties have come in ranging from storm driven Manx Shearwaters to Sparrowhawks that have collided with windows. In all 626 birds were dealt with in 1987.

One area of concern is the number of swans that have been brough to Middlebank. Mute Swans must be among the most popular birds in Britain but that does not guarantee their immunity from human carelessness and deliberate cruelty. So far Middlebank has had swans suffering from oil, tar, fishing line, lead shot, collisions with power lines and mauling by dogs. Some of the incidents with dogs have not been due to strays but animals whose owners encouraged them to attack the birds. Electricity pylons pose a particularly serious threat to flying swans especially in the South West and the Western Isles. Even putting streamers or other warning devices on the cables is of limited value in the dark or mist.

Besides birds Middlebank has had other creatures brought in, notably seals. A number of Common Seal pups have already been returned to the wild. Extra accommodation is being converted from an adjacent barn to take seals which, up to now, have been housed in the bird unit. Recent arrivals have been tested for the distemper like virus now affecting Common Seals in the North Sea and several apparently healthy pups have been found with traces. A new vaccine developed in Holland has been given to these animals though whether this will be effective is not yet known. The new seal unit has the advantage that it can be used as a quarantine area separate from the rest of the centre.

SOC branches may like to know that visits to Middlebank are welcome, preferably in the afternoon, as morning is taken up with cleaning and feeding. Lothian branch has already visited. The staff also do talks to interested groups and can be contacted on 0383 412520.

Stan da Prato

Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period July to September is covered here.*

The weather during the first part of the autumn was wet, with winds mainly from the west. These brought in several American waders and an unprecedented autumn influx of **Long-tailed Skuas.** The few days of easterly winds produced a few falls of continental migrants, with an arrival in the Northern Isles on 2nd September being one of the largest in recent years. Although there were several high quality rarities in September, October was to prove even more exciting.

Long-tailed Skua *Steven Brown*

Shearwaters were scarce, with only small numbers of **Sooties** reported, although Turnberry produced 2 **Balearics.** Far more unexpected were Scotland's first **White-faced Storm Petrels,** when 2 passed Turnberry on 4 September along with 12 **Leach's.** An **American Wigeon** visited Loch Fleet in September, and a **Blue-winged Teal** Strathbeg in August. Male **King Eiders** were present in Shetland, on Fair Isle and off Aberdeen, when females were in Shetland and at Aberlady. Three male **Surf Scoters** were at Gullane and a **Ruddy Duck** at Loch Gelly.

A **Quail** was at Dale of Walls, with 2 on Fair Isle and 6 at Leven. **Corncrakes** appeared in Shetland, Fair Isle and Aberdeen. Westray held a **Crane** until early July. Scotland's first **Caspian Plover** was seen by a lucky few at Aberlady on 12-13 July. Fair Isle produced 2 **American Golden Plovers,** with others on North Ronaldsay and Stronsay. Scotland's second **Western Sandpiper** visited Shetland on 25 September. **Little Stints** arrived in exceptionally high numbers. Maximum counts included 90 at Virkie, 33 on Fair Isle, 37 at Udale Bay, 60 at Lossiemouth and 63 at Aberlady. A **Temminck's Stint** was on Unst, but much rarer was a **Least Sandpiper** at Cove. A **White-rumped Sandpiper** was on North Ronaldsay, while Shetland produced 3 **Pectoral Sandpipers,** with singles on Fair Isle, in Orkney, on South Uist, at Lossiemouth and at Strathbeg. Unusually high counts of **Curlew Sandpipers** included 57 on North Ronaldsay, 77 in Udale Bay, 250 at Findhorn, 55 on the Ythan and 70 at Tyninghame. A **Broad-billed Sandpiper** was in Spey Bay in July and single **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** on North Ronaldsay and South Uist. Single **Great Snipe** were seen on Whalsay and Out Skerries and a **Long-billed Dowitcher** was at Irvine, but even rarer was an **Upland Sandpiper** at Sandside Bay. **Spotted Redshank** and **Ruff** appeared in high numbers. **Green Sandpipers** were also rather common but **Wood Sandpipers** were scarce. A **Wilson's Phalarope** visited Hillwell on 22-23 September.

Good numbers of **Pomarine Skuas** were noted in several areas. The unprecedented influx of **Long-tailed Skuas** began in the Northern Isles on 18 September and lasted for several days. At least 70 were seen in Shetland and 22 in the Lothians. Higher counts in Orkney included 44 off Birsay and 82 off North Ronaldsay. Birds also occurred off Chanonry Point, Kessock, Tarradale, Aberdeenshire and St. Andrews. A **Mediterranean Gull** was seen at Stevenstone and **Sabine's Gulls** appeared off Whalsay, North Ronaldsay, Chanonry Point, Hound Point and Aberlady. Fifteen **Roseate Terns** visited Port Edgar on 13 August. A **Bridled Tern** was on the Ythan in August. An unseasonal **Little Auk** was off the Ramna Stacks in Shetland on 17 July.

Alpine Swifts were in Sutherland and North Ronaldsay, a **Kingfisher** in Shetland, a **Bee-eater** at Loch Fleet and 3 **Hoopoes** on Whalsay. **Wrynecks** appeared in good numbers, particularly during the fall on 2 September. The Northern Isles were also visited by **Great Spotted Woodpeckers.**

Fair Isle produced a **Short-toed Lark** on 23 September and 120 **Tree Pipits** on 2 September. Single **Citrine Wagtails** appeared on Fair Isle and Copinsay. A scattering of **Bluethroats** occurred in the Northern Isles. 480 **Wheatears** were on Fair Isle on 27 August. Fair Isle also produced a **Lanceolated Warbler.** An **Aquatic Warbler** was at Reay, while **Marsh Warblers** occurred on Foula and Fair Isle. A **Booted Warbler** was on South Ronaldsay with **Icterine** and **Barred Warblers** from Shetland to Barns Ness. 170 **Garden Warblers** were on Fair Isle on 2 September and 250 on North Ronaldsay. As in 1987 there was an influx of **Greenish Warblers** in mid August and early September, with a minimum of 6 in Shetland, 2 on Fair Isle and 7 in Orkney. Only 2 **Yellow-browed Warblers** were seen in September, though **Wood Warblers** were more common than usual. Only 2 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were reported, both in Shetland though **Pied Flycatchers** occurred in substantial numbers. Early September also saw good totals of **Red-backed Shrikes.** A **Woodchat Shrike** stayed in Shetland from 2 July to the end of September.

Scotland's second **Red-eyed Vireo** was in the Western Isles in late September. **Common Crossbills** were seen from Shetland to Fife. At least 25 **Common Rosefinches** were seen in Shetland, with 3 on Fair Isle and 2 in Orkney, where the **Pallas's Rosefinch** remained until mid July. A **Hawfinch** was in Shetland in August and a scattering of **Lapland Buntings.** Unusual Buntings included 3 **Ortolans,** a **Little Bunting** and 2 **Yellow-breasted Buntings** in Shetland, with another of the latter on Fair Isle and 2 **Black-headed Buntings** on North Ronaldsay. However one of the best rarities of the period was a **Northern Oriole** on Benbecula in late September.

STOP PRESS

October produced a plethora of rare migrants including Britain's second ***Blyth's Pipit,*** *several* ***Olive-backed Pipits, Pechora Pipit,*** *lots of* ***Waxwings, Pied Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, 2 Lanceolated Warblers, 3 Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers,*** *several* ***Pallas's, Radde's*** *and* ***Dusky Warblers, Isabelline Shrike*** *and Europe's first* ***Blackburnian Warbler.***

Pete Ellis

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Atlas in Progress

Atlas data continues to trickle in but it is too early to state exactly what coverage has been like in the first year of the project in Scotland as a whole. Some areas have been well covered (eg Caithness, Lothians), while others have been comparatively poorly covered. What is becoming clear is that in many of our thinly populated counties it is the less difficult 10 km squares which have been surveyed this year, while the really difficult ones have yet to be visited. Obviously a special effort will be required next year to account for these remote squares. I can state from personal experience that such squares are most rewarding in terms of good birds, scenery and a sense of achievement – so why not sign up now with your local Atlas organiser for a difficult square (or two!) next breeding season?

Unless repeated visits are made it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether or not a species is definitely breeding in a particular location. At least eight 2-hour (preferably at least sixteen 1-hour) visits are made to each 20 km square, so there is a good chance of confirming breeding within squares. Some of the data received so far, however, have been of species merely seen in squares. This suggests that more visits (outwith timed tetrad visits) to squares are required to confirm breeding – something I've tried to encourage from the start of the project. A glance at the Table below confirms this. This shows, for some species, the percentages of records received so far (for Scotland only) which have been assigned to the definite 'Breeding' category, compared with the corresponding figures from the original Breeding Atlas (for the British Isles as a whole).

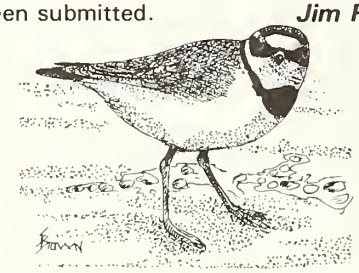
Confirmed Breeding Records (%)

	Old Atlas	New Atlas
Lapwing	86	87
Snipe	56	69
Tawny Owl	78	61
Wren	95	91
Robin	98	86
Blackbird	97	87
Song Thrush	97	86
Chaffinch	97	92
Greenfinch	86	76

With Lapwing about the same proportion of records received in the two projects are of confirmed breeding. With Snipe it is encouraging that proportionately more New Atlas records than Old Atlas records are of confirmed breeding. This could be accounted for by the fact that we are comparing current Scottish records with all previous British and Irish records and that the greater numbers encountered in the field in Scotland facilitate confirmation of breeding. The proportion of all Tawny Owl records which are of confirmed breeding was greater in the original Atlas than it is so far in the New Atlas in Scotland. It is possible this is due to 10 km squares not receiving more than one nocturnal visit. Focussing attention on the six common passerines in the Table, a clear pattern emerges. Without exception the proportions of records which are of confirmed breeding are smaller for the New Atlas than they were for the Old Atlas. I would urge all fieldworkers, in the light of these figures, to submit supplementary records for all species for all squares. I have deliberately highlighted common species here to illustrate that supplementary breeding records are required not only for uncommon or rare species. Also it may be advisable to pay more than one night-time visit to a square to confirm breeding of nocturnal species. Supplementary record forms will be distributed to all fieldworkers in time for the 1989 breeding season. While these supplementary breeding records are most important, please remember that breeding birds should never be disturbed.

Finally, a plea to all fieldworkers who have not yet submitted their data for 1988. Please send it to your local Atlas organiser so that he may in turn direct it to me. A full assessment of the project's progress in the first year cannot be made until all outstanding worksheets and summary cards have been submitted.

Jim Reid



Ringed Plover *Steven Brown*

Grampian Bar-B-Q

Midsummer weekend now appears to be a firm date for a barbecue at Linn Cottage, Inverey. Friday night (17 June) found Jamie and I in Glen Lui at Derry Lodge, where we entrenched ourselves in the new 'Bob Scott's Bothy'. In the gloaming we saw Kestrel and Peregrine amid the sounds of Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Common Sandpiper. After some good crack with the other inmates and a surfeit of tea and chocolate biscuits we turned in for the night.

We woke to the piping of Oystercatchers (lovely birds) and, following a quick breakfast, we were soon padding up the Luibeg path towards Ben Macdui. The steep path up Sron Riach could only be described as a grind and a good excuse for a stop was found when a hen partridge broke over and displayed to distract us from her eight 'cheepers'. By ten o'clock we were on the summit. To the west Ben Nevis stood out and appeared closer than the fifty + miles quoted on the summit indicator. We walked to the North Top and enjoyed an early 'brunch' whilst a cock Snow Bunting sang below us from a granite block.

We decided to return via Creagan a Choire Etchachan, climbing Derry Cairngorm en route. We had spendid views of the summits and as we headed south the screes fell away in Derry Cairngorm. The air was filled with the resinous aroma of ancient Scots Pines. We covered the last fewmiles back to the Linn o' Dee in good time and amid a constant stream of punters. Could it possibly be a flag day in Aberdeen? At the cottage we quaffed the first drinks of the evening while Bill Craigie cooked meats of dubious origin on the sizzling coals. Meanwhile Alistair Duncan searched the remains of a Lapwing for fleas. One specimen was found, but ..... did it belong to the Lapwing or Alistair? The evening passed with an analysis of the various whisky sp. that had emerged.

Sunday started at 04.50 when I was hauled from my sleeping bag to go and witness the fledging of two broods of Jon Hardey's favourite raptor. The rest of Sunday was spent at a leisurely pace and we left the cottage at tea-time having enjoyed a super weekend thanks to the hospitality of our hosts Marion and Bill Craigie ..... roll on June '89.

Brian Stewart

Whooper Swan Coded Rings

The Wildfowl Trust visited the Whooper Swan's Icelandic breeding grounds in May and again in August 1988. The aim of the project was to compare the reproductive performance of birds from different habitat types in order to gain a better understanding of why swan populations have such low annual reproductive success. The results from Iceland show that nests in lowland breeding areas had larger clutches than highland areas, but at fledgling both areas had similar brood sizes (around 3 young per family). The next stage in the investigation is twofold. One is to find out where birds from different parts of Iceland distribute themselves in Britain and Ireland. The other is to discover if family members have survived the autumn migration. We therefore caught and marked 400 swans with engraved plastic leg rings. This means that, together with our previous efforts, nearly 10% of the Iceland population is ringed.

We should be grateful for any observations of ringed Whooper Swans that indicate the code, ring colour, date, time, place, habitat type (grass field, pond, etc), flock size and, very importantly, the number of young that are associated with the parents. One further record that would be most helpful is a count of the number of young and brood sizes in the flock. Information should be sent to: **Carl Mitchell, The Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT.**

1988 Photo Competition Winners

First: Grey Herons, Galloway — *Brian Turner*

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

Second: Blackcaps, Borders — *Eric Middleton*

Third: Oystercatcher, Shetland — *David Hassell*

Seabird Spectacular

Scotland holds some of the largest and most impressive seabird colonies in the North Atlantic with several species present in internationally important numbers. These concentrations are of interest in themselves and also as important top predators in marine food chains. What happens to our seabirds should concern anyone who uses the water or eats food from the sea. Oil pollution has been known as a threat to seabirds for many years; other forms of pollution and the effects of commercial fisheries now also give concern. The choice of seabirds as the theme for the 1988 SOC Conference was particularly relevant and made for an absorbing series of talks.

Studying seabirds

Several speakers stressed the advantages of being able to study birds, at least on their colonies, relatively easily. Compared to many land birds seabirds are relatively large and long lived, with a low reproductive rate, which typically don't breed until several years old. This means that one or two poor seasons don't have the drastic effect on populations that is so obvious with songbirds. However, it also means that seabirds take a long time to bounce back when their numbers are affected by persecution or adverse breeding conditions.

Seabirds and pollutants

Bob Furness described how his work on Foula's Bonxies led to the discovery of alarmingly high levels of heavy metals such as mercury and cadmium in their bodies. Some of these substances are naturally present in the sea but industrial processes add more. Extending his studies to Gough Island in the South Atlantic led to the surprising find that Gough Skuas had even higher levels. This could be because the southern skuas ate more birds than the Shetland Bonxies which took more fish. However, other southern seabirds had even higher levels, notably petrels and albatrosses. Theoretically this meant they should not be breeding successfully but clearly they were! The birds have adaptations to allow them to store mercury as non toxic crystals and eliminate it through their feathers. As large albatrosses moult so slowly they have the highest pollutant levels. This raises an intriguing point about bald human males! Work on museum specimens shows that around Britain pollutant levels in Gannets have increased this century by 75%. They are higher off the south west than in the north and east possibly because of differences in diet; mackerel are larger, longer lived and more likely to concentrate heavy metals than sand eels.

Seabirds at sea

Obviously it is vital to know where seabirds go and what they do when not at colonies. The Nature Conservancy Council Seabirds at Sea Team has been plotting the distribution of birds around our coasts for some years now. Mark Tasker summarised their findings. Birds do not spread uniformly ove the sea surface. They tend to congregate round certain breeding and feeding sites. Auks feed more over sandy bottoms than other substrates. Time of day is also important as the prey animals are not equally available throughout 24 hours; sand eels may burrow into sediments during the middle of the day. Bird distribution also changes seasonally and breeding birds tend to range less widely than non-breeders. Not surprisingly, different species operate at different distances from their colonies though there is much overlap and variation. For example St Kilda Guillemots seem to range much further than Fair Isle or Firth of Forth birds.

Arctic Tern *P.J. Newman*

Looking at seabird distribution from planes or ships gives a most useful picture of the areas birds use throughout the year. This allows bodies like NCC and RSPB to comment on development plans, tanker routes etc. However it is also desirable to be able to follow the activities of individuals when they leave their nest sites. This is what Sarah Wanless has been doing on the Isle of May using radio telemetry. Specially developed waterproof radios have been fitted to Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills and, so far, one Puffin. The results are already of great interest. The signal stops when the bird dives and sounds different when the bird is on the sea or flying. This means Sarah and her helpers can work out how far the birds go and the time, and even the depth, at which they feed. Shags feed close in and take longer to recover between dives. All the auks go further though there are differences in their feeding locations and diving behaviour.

Seabirds and fish stocks

This was really the central theme of the conference. Crashes in seabird populations have been recorded in the Pacific following heavy fishing pressure by man, notably off the coast of Peru where an industry based on harvesting the guano of c28 million birds was destroyed when the anchovy fishery depleted the bird's food supplies. In the Antarctic bird and seal numbers have increased as large whales are now so scarce they take only a fraction of the krill; this situation could change again if krill fisheries become established.

Around Britain most seabirds have increased due to protection and increases in stocks of small fish, such as sand eels, following declines in larger fish such as herring. Herring are now protected and increasing again. Sand eels have been heavily fished, especially around Shetland. Poor breeding success was noted in Arctic Terns in Shetland in the early 1980s by the Shetland Ringing Group. This has got worse and Kittiwakes were also doing badly by 1985. The problem has now spread to skuas, and even Puffins, though Guillemots and Shags still seem to be doing well. For two years now John Uttley has studied Arctic Terns on the Northern Isles and, for comparison, on Coquet Island off the Northumberland coast. The English Terns do better than the Shetland birds,

not because they lay more eggs but because they rear more young to fledgling. Shetland chicks have been dying of starvation and exposure as adults are so busy trying to find food they can't feed the chicks properly. At Coquet several fish species are brought in by the terns but in Shetland they have to rely largely on sand eels. Sand eel stocks are said to be at similar levels to c15 years ago but they seem to be less available to the birds, possibly swimming deeper. Fewer young sand eels are in the population of the size terns prefer to feed their chicks.

Even apparently robust birds like the skuas have been doing badly recently. Richard Caldow's work on Foula, following many years of work organised by Bob Furness, shows that Bonxies are now finding it harder to find food for their young. Though popularly thought of as pirates Bonxies, at least till recently, largely feed on fish in the breeding season. As finding fish becomes harder the adults have to spend longer away from their territories increasing the risk that their young will be killed and eaten by other adults. Even when young skuas (and other seabirds) survive to fledging they are now more likely to be killed by Bonxies; this has recently hit Foula's Arctic Skuas.

Auks on the May

Mike Harris and the Puffin are now almost synonymous but he now spends more time looking at Guillemots on the Isle of May. Guillemots don't breed down burrows and therefore can be watched feeding their young in a way that Puffins can't. Starting to study Guillemots a few years ago has proved opportune as the first signs of a decline in these birds in the Firth of Forth now seem to be showing. Though adult survival is still high at c94% recruitment of young into the colony so far is lower than is needed to maintain it. This could be due to birds going to other colonies but there have been big auk wrecks recently and the suspicion is that too many immature birds are dying at sea. Adults are now spending less time together on the ledges, again indicating it is harder for them to find food. Even with Puffins adult survival has dropped recently and birds have been coming into the colony in spring partly in winter plumage, though chick production is still high. Mike also made the interesting point that all those photos of Puffins with lots of fish in their beaks aren't ideal for the Puffin, which catches one larger fish with less effort than a series of smaller ones. The situation is not the same as in Shetland as there is no sand eel fishery in the Forth, but there has been an increase in other fish species in the area. There are also signs that Kittiwakes in East Scotland are not fledging so many chicks as they used to.

Gulls and people

Not all seabirds are viewed as desirable and large gulls can cause problems though Pat Monaghan definitely feels Herring Gulls have had a bad press. They can cause problems of noise and dirt when they nest on rooftops and spread disease, eg. Salmonella, when they move from rubbish tips to reservoirs to roost. Their effect on vegetation is less than Puffins, and on tern colonies may have been exaggerated, though they may prevent terns recolonising. They can cause spectacularly expensive damage, especially when wearing rings, if they collide with aircraft.

Many of the attempts to control gulls have been unsuccessful as they are not based on proper understanding of the birds' biology. Gulls are long lived and site faithful so measures may need to be repeated over several years to have an effect. Destroying eggs just leads to more eggs! Disturbance usually leads to the birds spreading even further! There are lots of immatures around waiting for territories. Culling in winter is pointless as so much migration takes place. One vivid example of how **not** to combat the gull problem was in a town in NE England where vans with loud speakers played distress calls early in the morning. The gulls merely answered back, which was not well received by the ratepayers who had originally complained about gull noise!

Some culling is inevitable if gulls are to be kept off certain places but other methods such as distress calls can work eg. on reservoirs. Open rubbish tips mean a problem; over 90% of British rubbish is tipped rather than incinerated due to cost. Herring Gulls are now declining in eastern Scotland and other parts of Britain (46% overall) so control measures should only be used where really necessary.

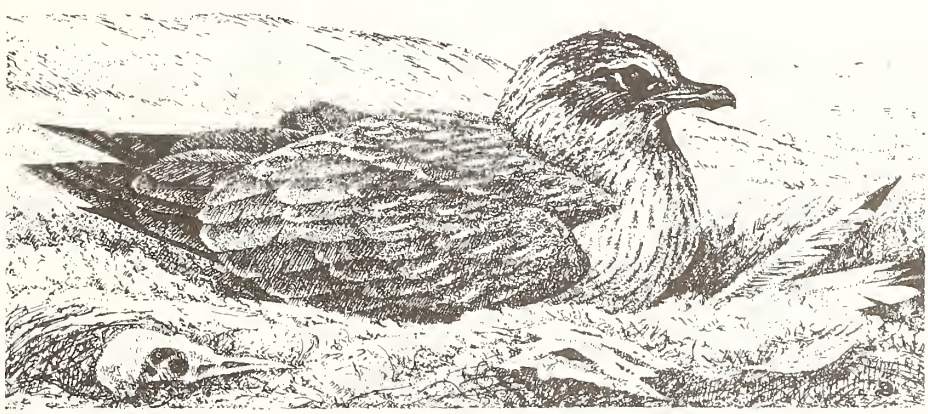
Last not least

Bobby Tulloch closed the conference with a fine selection of slides of Shetland, finishing with a particularly polite seal which waved goodbye to the audience. Bobby also made the useful point that the recent problems around Shetland should be seen in context; just over a century ago Fulmars did not breed in Britain outside St. Kilda and most seal and seabird numbers were far lower than today. Human activity needs watching but natural changes in the marine environment are also likely to be having an effect; Shetland Eiders, which don't feed on sand eels, are also down in numbers.

Inevitably this report has concentrated on the main talks but an SOC Conference is about more than scientific ornithology, however well presented. We had the expected high standard of slides on Friday evening and two excellent after dinner speakers in Malcolm Ogilvie and Frank Hamilton, though Frank was so carried away by his jokes he forgot to give his toast! That sort of thing is what makes a Club Conference different to more formal, scientific events; long may it continue.

THANKS: to all the speakers who, in order of appearance, were Mark Tasker (NCC), Bob Furness and Pat Monaghan (Glasgow University), Mike Harris (ITE), John Uttley and Richard Caldow (Glasgow University), Sarah Wanless (ITE/NCC) and Bobby Tulloch (himself), to the staff and club members, Peter Gordon and the Lothian Branch for all their work, Borders Branch who organised the raffle and Alastair P.D. for overseeing it all.

Stan da Prato



Great Skua *Derek Robertson*

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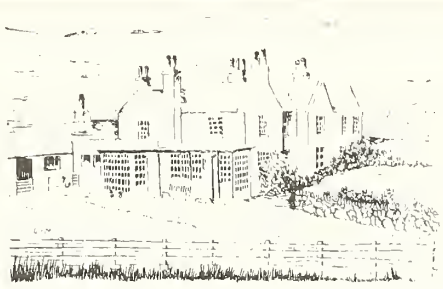

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist — almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

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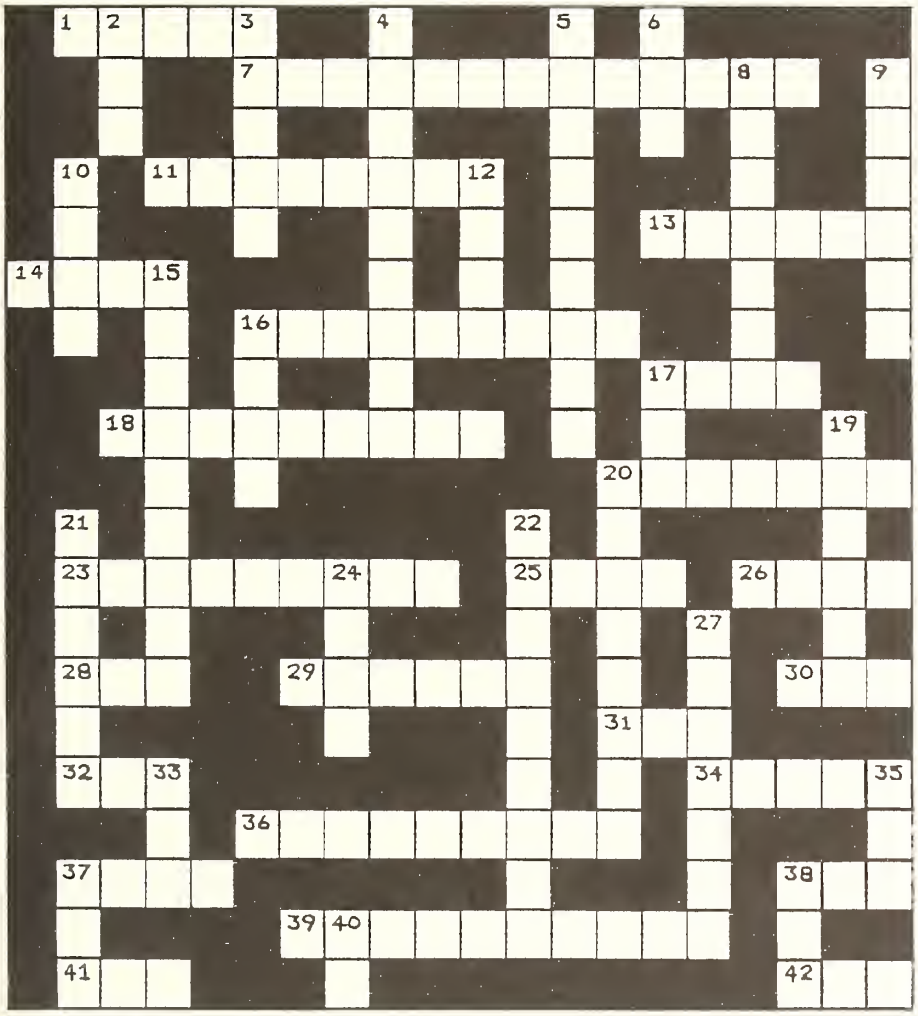
Birdword



Clues across

1. Unintentional trap for diving seabirds. (5)
7. What you consider yourself? (13)
11. Pasta eating penguin. (8)
13. Religious sounding wader. (6)
14. Good for a grouse. (4)
16. Auk with a French bill. (9)
17. Hebridean island. (4)
18. Mainly practised in museums. (9)
20. Hebridean habitat. (7)
23. One of these was a first for 15 down. (9)
25. Good winds for migrants. (4)
26. Band to an American. (4)
28. More of this could allow you to go on expensive bird tours. (3)
29. Ecosystem reviewed in this issue. (6)
30. Research organisation. (3)
32. Birds, and us, all have to do this eventually. (3)
34. Largest of 10 down's family. (5)
36. Spatulate feeder. (9)
37. Turn this to find answers. (4)
38. Milk top destroyer. (3)
39. Tree tapper. (10)
41. Slippery Heron food. (3).
42. Bird in a cage. (3)

Clues down

2. Connects a bird's – and your – back and breastbone. (3)
3. Small fish a Dipper might eat. (5)
4. Optical aid. (9)
5. Seabird with golfing connections. (9)
6. Famous Oxford Institute. (3)
8. Shouldn't be fished round Shetland. (7)
9. Does this Orcadian pressure group duck things? (6)
10. What you shouldn't do when you see others have missed a rarity. (4)
12. Fair _____ (4)
15. Island on the front page. (9)
16. Useful for woodland studies. (4)
17. Extinct New Zealand giant. (3)
19. Gorse-loving finch (6)
20. Uncomplimentary name for rare upland wader. (8)
21. Useful for your telescope. (6)
22. Its eggs and young need protection from collectors. (9)
24. Biblical zoo keeper. (4)
27. Still often unwelcome on 14 across. (7)
33. Did it come first? (3)
35. Only a licensed ringer would use this. (3)
37. Can be made from 24 *Turdus merula*. (3)
38. Gulls would feed on this. (3)
40. Islay head land (2)

ERSKINE EXPEDITIONS

Add some Arctic birds to your list in 1989.

Last summer, members of Erskine Expeditions saw, amongst many species, a Ross' Gull, Snowy Owls, Ivory Gulls, Gyr-Falcons, Little Auks, Smith's Longspurs, and even some Sandhill Cranes at 68°N. And, in the Falklands, Black-Browed Albatross breeding in colonies, King Penguins, Crested Cara-Caras and White-Chinned Petrels.

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True love

It was a week before Easter. Spring was in the air, Cupid's arrows had been aimed and one had pierced the breast of a lonely farmyard gander I was watching near Dronley. Instinctively he responded, for in his head was a programme to guide his behaviour inherited from some Greylag forefather. With loud, raucous honks he waddled out of the gate, toes in, chest out and head up with neck at full stretch. He made straight for the object of his desires and commenced courtship ritual. He circled round and round, stretching out his neck, dipping his head gracefully to touch it to the ground. But, alas, it was here in Dronley that our gander had first seen the light of day, not somewhere in the midst of a flock of his own kind in a spring meadow in far away Iceland. The imprints were all wrong. In fact the object of his desire wasn't a pretty young goose at all but a large and hairy Highland bull. The bull wasn't at all amused by the flapping fury round his back legs and the grabs at his ankles by a gander's bill, but no amount of kicking and rearward swings of the horned head could dampen the ardour of his assailant. So he took the only course of action open to him – he ran for his life.

Bede Pounder

Reviews

Birds in Mallorca *by John Busby; Christopher Helm; 1988; 128p, 135 colour and b&w illustrations; £16.95.*

John Busby's sketches and watercolour studies capture the essence of the bird in a way that no field guide can ever show. The economy, freedom and expressiveness of line show great understanding and awareness of the structure and movement of birds. The landscape drawings and watercolours are no less evocative and capture vividly the atmosphere and light of the Mediterranean. This book confirms John Busby's place as one of the leading wildlife artists of our time. A book to look and learn from and enjoy in the winter evenings ahead.

Mike Ashley

The quails, partridges and francolins of the world *by PA Johnsgard; Oxford University Press; 1988; 264 pp; 127 colour plates; 23 figs; 42 maps; £47.50.*

Large, expensive and one of a series by an author who seems confident to write about whole bird families despite limited field experience – in short the sort of book I instinctively dislike! It is the first to cover this group of birds in one volume this century and the plates, mostly by the late Henry Jones, are certainly attractive but I think it will appeal more to libraries and collectors than field naturalists.

SdP

A bird artist in Scotland *by Donald Watson; Witherby 1988; 144 pp many colour and b&w illustrations; £14.95.*

Donald Watson has evolved a very individual and personal style as a wildlife artist. This clearly shows in his paintings and drawings of the birdlife of Galloway. Here we are given an insight into the artist's deep understanding of birds, their actions, and surroundings as a whole. His work demonstrates first hand knowledge of birds and their behaviour, and captures the many moods and enchanting colours of one of Scotland's most beautiful and underrated areas. Paintings of wintering geese, Hen Harrier roosts, resting terns, encapsulate the harmony of light, colour and form. His feelings and passion for his adopted Kirkcudbrightshire are reflected in his paintings. Donald Watson displays a sensitivity and awareness of the changing landscape and its wildlife as well as an understanding of the dangers that threaten it.

Mike Ashley

Where to find birds in Australia *by John Bransbury; Hutchinson Australia 1987; 578 pp; 16 pp colour photos; 100 sketch maps; c £15.*

A thoroughly useful compilation put together by an emigrant from the UK who spent several years travelling throughout the country to produce this book. It covers mainland Australia and Lord Howe, Christmas and Cocos Islands. It is the only book of its type and essential for any visiting birder down under.

SdP

The Silvery Tay *by Keith Brockie; Dent 1988; 192 pp; 150 paintings, sketches and drawings. £15.95.*

A visually stunning book which captures in great depth and detail the wildlife along the length and breadth of the River Tay. Drawings of subtle strength handled with delicate line and tone are more than matched by water colour studies of translucent quality, intricate in detail without ever becoming fussy or overworked. Keith Brockie is skilled in his handling of a diverse range of subject matter. However his great strength lies in his portrayal of birds; especially impressive are the studies of Osprey, Merlin and herons. No less impressive are his beautiful flower and plant studies. Here is a freshness of approach, freeness of brush strokes, and skilled eye for texture and colour. This eye for detail is clearly shown in the artist's preference for working in close-up – birds on the nest, on the river, on the shore, but not, surprisingly, in flight or in a wider field of view.

This seems certain to be even more successful than his two previous books. The artist communicates clearly his love and enthusiasm for the wildlife and landscape detail of his native Scotland.

Mike Ashley

BIRDS IN MALLORCA

John Busby

John Busby, one of Europe's foremost artist/naturalists, has been drawing and painting the birds and landscapes of Mallorca since 1981, and this book is a personal record of the rich variety of wildlife which he found there.

A sheer joy to admire for the breathtaking quality of its artwork, the book will also be an invaluable travelling companion for the holiday birder.

£16.95 0-7470-0208-8
128 pages 210 x 260 mm

135 colour and black-and-white paintings and drawings.

November 88

CHRISTOPHER HELM

PUBLISHERS LIMITED

The Birds of the Pentland Hills *by Ian Munro; Scottish Academic Press; 1988; 208 pages; 8 b&w photographs. £9.50 (H); £4.95 (S).*

Many of us have long awaited this book and its title along with the price should ensure good sales. However, a more realistic title would have been 'A History of the Birds of the Pentland Hills'. Its conception was in the early 1930s when members of the Inverleith Field Club and the Midlothian Ornithologists' Club made a census of the birds of the Pentlands. The gestation period has certainly been long and the result is probably not quite what the author originally intended. The high standard of presentation is somewhat marred by a very unattractive cover.

The Introduction describes the location and a little of the geography of the Pentlands. The second section is on the history of the birds of the Pentlands. It is a scholarly chapter and by far the most interesting section of the book. The third section is entitled 'A Pentland Traverse 1948-49' and summarises 52 weekly traverses of the hills from February 1948 – January 1949. The book should ideally have been written then. The final and major part of the book (183 pages) is a species list arranged in the usual Voous order. I don't suppose that any species have been missed but the data is mainly taken from the surveys of the 1930s and 1940s with rather sparse information from recent years.

The love of the author for the hills comes over strongly, and criticisms apart, this book is an essential read for all of us who have spent time in the Pentlands watching birds.

Ian R Poxton

Seabirds: feeding ecology and role in marine ecosystems ed by J.P. Croxall; Cambridge University Press; 1987; 408pp; £30.

This book signals the coming of age of ecological marine ornithology as a scientific discipline. The papers provide broad taxonomic and geographical coverage, and are diverse in their approach, but fall roughly into three groups. First, there are five general articles, then follow four papers on feeding ecology and finally come six papers on the part played by seabirds in marine ecosystems, from highly productive high latitude and upwelling zones to the relatively poor regions of the open oceans in the tropics. All the contributions emphasize quantitative approaches, and together they may result in seabirds being taken more seriously than in the past as consumers of marine life. Croxall & Prince, for instance, estimate that the 70 million seabirds which breed at South Georgia consume around 7.8 million tonnes of prey annually, of which almost three-quarters consists of krill. The book is excellently produced, with many clear diagrams and tables, though virtually no pictures of birds; there is also a comprehensive index. For anyone seriously interested in the ecology of seabirds, it will provide engrossing reading.

N. Philip Ashmole

A birdwatchers guide to Japan *by Mark Brazil; Harper & Row; 220 pp; b&w maps; c £8.95.*

An English language guide to 60 of the best birding sites in Japan with details of how to get there and where to stay as well as what birds you can see. Most Westerners who visit Japan do so on business rather than as tourists; this excellent little book should encourage them either to take time off or extend their stay.

SdP

Birds and Berries *by Barbara and David Snow; Poyser; 1988; 268 pp; many tables and illustrations; £16.00.*

This is the fruit of six years research into the relationships between birds and berry-producing plants in southern England. The first part dealts with plants, and the extent to which they are used by various seed-dispersers (and misused by seed and pulp-predators). In the second part each bird species has a chapter in which its seasonal pattern of exploitation of the plant species is analysed. The third section interprets the data within a wider ecological and evolutionary framework. Many new facts about the interactions between our native birds and plants emerge from the Snows' investigation. Especially fascinating is the relationship between Holly and Mistle Thrushes (some Holly trees are defended by Mistle Thrushes as long term food sources). New information on gregarious feeding by birds on fruits is presented, as are details of competition between plants to attract birds, morphological adaptations of birds to fruit eating and much more. The book is also an important review of all the best literature on fruit-eating by European birds.

The data are presented in easily interpreted tables and the statistical treatment is simple and easy to understand. This, combined with a lucid writing style, results in a very stimulating and refreshing read. Botanists and gardeners as well as ornithologists will find the book most informative and enjoyable. Mention must also be made of John Busby's excellent illustrations which herald the beginning of each chapter.

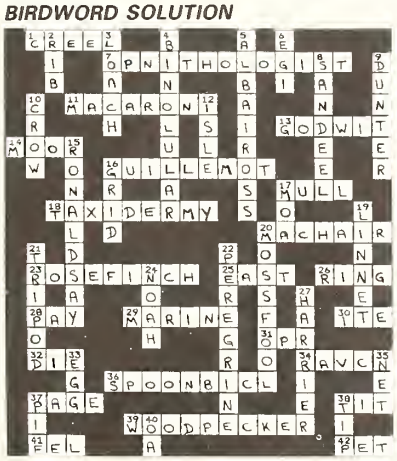
Jim Reid

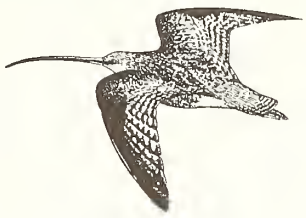
The Sparrows *by J.D. Summers-Smith; Poyser; 1988; 342 pp; 114 figs, 50 tables, 8 colour plates, 62 b&w dwgs; £22.50*

All twenty species of the genus *Passer* are covered in sixteen chapters with additional chapters on Characteristics and Interrelationships, Origins and Evolution and the Systematics of the sparrows. The book is particularly strong on the taxonomic side but also provides a comprehensive summary of how sparrows live – or at least what is currently known about this. Perhaps because of their abundance few people bother to study sparrows and such basic questions as what is happening to the numbers of House Sparrows in British towns can rarely be answered adequately. Anyone wanting to learn more about this common, confiding and accessible little bird should buy this book as an essential first step.

Stan da Prato

BIRDWORD SOLUTION





Birds of the Middle East and North Africa

by P. A. D. Hollom, R. Porter, S. Christensen and Ian Willis

"This is *the* definitive field guide to the birds of the arab world (and even beyond) – from Morocco across to Arabia and Iran. It covers over 700 species, with 350 illustrated in colour and the distribution of 510 shown in (breeding) species maps.
A review of the book quickly becomes a eulogy. It really is excellent. The high standard of the guide is also a reflection of the long and wide experience of its authors and illustrators." *Gulf Times*

320 pages including 40 colour plates, £14.00 net

October publication:

Weather and Bird Behaviour

by Norman Elkins

Some press comment on the first edition:

"I hope that most birdwatchers will learn from this book and the author should be congratulated for producing a very readable and stimulating work." *British Birds*

"It is a well-produced, clearly written, readily understood and remarkably complete reference work, which admirably fills an obvious gap." *Weather*

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T & A D POYSER

SOC Notices

Winter Syllabus Card 1988-89

After the delays experienced last winter Council was determined that this winter's programme should be published on time. It was but the postal dispute meant most members did not receive it until after the September meetings had taken place. Congratulations to all the Branch Committees concerned for getting the winter programme started; it seems word of mouth proved effective and the Members Nights were well attended.

The Syllabus Card itself contains an unacceptably high number of errors. Apologies to anyone whose name or talk was wrongly spelled or described.

Clyde Branch Indoor Meetings

Would Clyde members and anyone visiting the branch please amend their cards as follows:

Dec 5 (not 7) Prof Peter Slater – Why do birds sing?
Jan 9 (not 11) Iain Gibson – Local recording
Feb 6 Dr Pat Monaghan – Changing fortunes of terns (not Bird life in Pakistan where Pat has never been)
Mar 6 No change!
Apr 3 AGM and an Edinburgh evening

Grampian Branch Secretary

Mrs Margaret Swallow has not been divorced despite being described as Miss in the Syllabus Card. Her correct address is **2 Stranathro Terrace, Muchalls, Stonehaven AB3 2RP**.

Fife Venues

The November and February meetings of the Fife Branch are in the **Strathearn Hotel, Kirkcaldy** and not in St. Andrews as stated in the syllabus card.

New Galloway Goose Weekend

To avoid clashing with the Spring Conference at Crieff (or even Creiff!) this has been moved to Friday 24 – Sunday 26 February 1989. For further details contact **Miss Joan Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW.**

New Bookshop Catalogue

This is now available. If you do not already have a copy write to 21 Regent Terrace or phone 031-556 6042.

Scottish Bird Report 1987

This invaluable publication is now available at £3 from **SOC (SBR) 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.** Would members please note that the decision to have the SBR as a separate publication again is not just an economy measure but one that was welcomed by Angus Hogg the SBR editor. Two issues of *Scottish Birds* and four of *Scottish Bird News* will continue to be sent to all members as before.

Index for Scottish Birds

This will be produced at the end of 1989 to cover Vols 14 and 15 (ie 1986-1989).

Spring Conference

The joint SOC/BTO one day conference will be held at the Crieff Hydro on Saturday 4 March 1989. A Programme and Booking Form are enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

Changes of local recorders

Fife – **D.E. Dickson** is now at **45 Hawthorn Terrace, Thornton, Fife KY1 4DZ.** Grampian (except Moray) – **Ken Shaw** is the new recorder at **4 Headland Court, Newtonhill, nr Stonehaven, Kincardine AB3 2SF.**

1988 Annual Raffle

There was a magnificent response to this year's raffle, drawn at the Conference, when a net total of £1193 was raised for club funds. Sale of tickets brought in £1243 while a further £150 was donated towards expenses, including £90 from 8 members towards the 1st prize. This meant that only £50 of the raffle income had to be used for the £200 of expenses (£100 for 1st prize, £84 printing, £3 postage and £13 registration fee).

The Borders Branch wishes to thank all those who so generously sent donations and bought tickets, and also the individual members, Branches and firms who kindly gave the prizes. Many members sold tickets, and all who helped to raise this excellent sum are warmly thanked for their efforts. A cheque was sent to the Club Treasurer in November, and all Branch Secretaries were notified of the prize winners. Prizes were distributed directly after the Conference; anyone wanting a list should send a s.a.e. to the Club Secretary.

Thank you all for helping us to exceed our target, and for raising the marvellous sum of £1193; the draw after the speeches makes a most enjoyable end to the Annual Dinner. Our faith in the generosity of members and their willingness to help the Club has been upheld, and we have agreed to organise the 1989 raffle.

Borders Branch Committee

BOU Annual Conference 1989 – Applied Ornithology

This will be held at The University of Surrey, Guildford from 13-16 April 1989. Details from the **British Ornithologists' Union, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Tring, Herts HP23 6AP.**

Breeding failure of seabirds in 1988

Several species of seabirds in Shetland produced few young this summer which has resulted in widespread concern about possible conflict between the birds and the Shetland sandeel fishery. However, preliminary results of the ITE/NCC scheme monitoring the breeding success of seabirds around Britain show that some seabirds elsewhere have also experienced hard times. The Shetland failure may be part of a wider problem. Any information, however fragmentary or general, on whether your local seabirds appeared to have had a normal or an abnormal breeding season would be welcomed by **Dr M.P. Harris, Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire AB3 4BY.**

Colour-ringed Pied Wagtails

From August 1988 Pied Wagtails in Aberdeen are being individually colour-ringed as part of a study into roosting and feeding behavour. Up to three colour rings plus a conventional BTO ring will be used on each bird. Details of any sightings, including location and date would be much appreciated. All sightings will be acknowedged by **Innes Sim, 259 Westburn Road, Aberdeen AB2 4QH.**

Foreign Birdwatching Reports and Information Service

This 36-page booklet lists a collection of trip reports and other non-published material useful to the background planning of foreign birdwatching trips. Over 400 items from a total of 114 countries and geographical areas are catalogued. Whether planning a fortnight's holiday in Corfu or a three-month expedition to Papua New Guinea, this Catalogue is an essential key to finding out what information is available, and should form an important part of any travelling birdwatcher's library. To obtain your copy send 60p postage stamps/postal order/cheque to **Steve Whitehouse, 5 Stanway Close, Blackpole, Worcester WR4 9XL.**

Small Ads

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIRD REPORT 1987

The report is now available at the price of £2. Copies can be obtained from Brian Stewart, Ken Shaw or myself Andrew Thorpe, 30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen, Tel: 733296.

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Enjoying the Atlas

There is no doubt that the new Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland will be an important document and a worthy successor to its illustrious predecessor. However long term scientific value should not be allowed to obscure the real reason for taking part for most of us – it's fun to go out and see birds in Scotland. Scottish Atlas Organiser Jim Reid outlines changes agreed over the winter to emphasize that this aspect is just as much part of Atlassing in the 1980's as it was twenty years ago.

The second season's fieldwork for the New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland begins in April. Hopefully the weather will be as kind for fieldworkers this year as it was for most of last. There are still data to be returned for 1988 but the map gives a reasonably accurate indication of the coverage achieved by over 400 birdwatchers throughout Scotland in 1988. Each dot represents a 10km square in which at least eight tetrads were surveyed last year. Clearly coverage has been excellent in some parts of the country, while in others it has been poor. For example few 10km squares remain to be surveyed in the Lothians and Borders, Fife and Kinross and Caithness. On the other hand there is much to be done in remote areas in the west. Coverage, in fact, roughly reflects the distribution of birdwatchers. Obviously if we are to get complete coverage of Scotland within the three years there will have to be a major redistribution of birdwatchers in the country. So if you live in a well-surveyed area and you want to maintain your contribution to this important project you have a choice. Either retire and move house to a remote 10km square in the west or (less drastic, more practical and only slightly less appealing) attempt to do fieldwork further afield this year. I've already extolled the pleasures of fieldwork in the Highlands and Islands so consult the map and please endeavour to fill in a remote gap this year. For those of you staying at home you can, of course, survey more of your own local square.

Atlas methods remain essentially the same in 1989 as in 1988 but a few changes have been introduced to make things a bit easier for fieldworkers. It was apparent last year that it was very time-consuming filling in, from a field notebook, both a Worksheet and a Summary Card, the latter containing exactly the same data as the former. Further generous funding from NCC means that the data will be computerised in a way that makes Summary Cards redundant. This will save time and reduce errors. More good news is that the Fieldwork Instructions have been revamped resulting in, we hope, an improved layout and greater clarity. As data are at a premium, especially here in Scotland, we have relaxed the condition whereby a minimum of eight tetrads in a 10km square was required. So if you have data from, for example, six tetrads in a 10km square from 1988 you may bring it up to the minimum of eight by surveying a further two tetrads this year. However a minimum of eight tetrads per 10km square in any one year remains the preferred target.

Atlas coverage in 1988 (%)

Aberdeen & Banff	51
Angus	70
Argyll (N) & Mull	24
Argyll (S) & Gigha	22
Arran, Bute & Cumbrae	29
Ayrshire	56
Benbecula & the Uists	28
Borders	73
Caithness	76
Central Scotland	74
Dumfries	55
Fife & Kinross	87
Inverness (E) & Speyside	55
Inverness (W)	14
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	43
Kincardine	40
Kirkcudbright	30
Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbarton	9
Lewis & Harris	29
Lothians	93
Moray & Nairn	74
Orkney	78
Perthshire	46
Rhum, Eigg, Canna & Muck	75
Ross-shire	16
Shetland	21
Skye	18
Sutherland	36
Wigtown	19
Overall	**39**

The main aims of the New Atlas are to map the distribution and the abundance of British and Irish birds during the breeding season. Information on abundance comes from data collected within tetrads (2 × 2km squares). Information on distribution comes from data collected within 10km squares (which includes the tetrad data). It is *not* an aim of the New Atlas to compile complete species lists for all *tetrads* but it certainly is an aim of the project to compile such lists for *all 10km squares*. As all species breeding in a 10km square are not detected during tetrad visits it is essential that we receive casual and supplementary records from fieldworkers. These are records of birds breeding in your 10km square which you did not detect during timed tetrad visits and records of birds breeding in other 10km squares. Forms for recording such records in 1989 will be available to all fieldworkers. These additional records may come from a variety of alternative but reliable sources. Regional Organisers of the New Atlas are encouraged to extract breeding records from local bird reports, local atlas projects, etc. for inclusion in the Atlas – always provided these records refer to New Atlas fieldwork years – 1988, 1989 or 1990. I know from personal experience that casual/supplementary breeding records may be discovered fortuitously – finding a Stonechat nest instead of your golf ball in the gorse, for example. But the best way to get extra breeding records is to go out and actively seek them. Everyone knows that two hours in each of eight tetrads is not the best way of discovering *all* birds breeding in a 10km square. So while these timed tetrad visits are an essential part of the project they must be complemented by extra visits to the square in order to get a complete bird list for that square. In this respect the New Atlas is similar to the original atlas – and just as much fun. So as we approach the second season in the field the message is to go out and get some serious enjoyment from atlassing – over 400 birdwatchers can't be wrong.

Anyone interested in participating in the New Atlas in 1989 is invited to write to their local Atlas Regional Organiser, or to Jim Reid, the organiser of the project in Scotland, at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period October to December is covered here.*

The latter part of the autumn featured long periods of easterly winds and a few westerly gales. This resulted in a wonderful mixture of Siberian and American vagrants which made it one of the best autumns for rarities for years. Although this wealth of rare birds was shared throughout the country, the Northern Isles had the lion's share. Fair Isle was sensational, producing probably the best ever week for rare birds in early Oct (see also the Fair Isle feature in this issue). Among a plethora of easterners Europe's first **Blackburnian Warbler** made a brief appearance. Later in the month Fair Isle again stole the show with Britain's second ever **Blyth's Pipit.** This enigmatic species was only added to the British list quite recently when a museum specimen, which had been shot late last century, was discovered. There were several massive falls of **thrushes** in late Oct. when the largest irruption of **Waxwings** since 1975 brought massive numbers to some areas.

Dec. was mild, wet and quite windy. This resulted in a scarcity of **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls.** In Orkney the accidental introduction of Canadian Pondweed into the Loch of Harray has resulted in an enormous build up of wildfowl. A count on 30 Dec. revealed over 13000 birds, including 1000+ **Whooper Swans** and c.8000 **Wigeon.**

An albino **Red-throated Diver** was off St. Abbs in Nov. and a **White-billed Diver** flew past Peterhead in Oct. while the Whalsay bird also returned. A **Black-necked Grebe** was at Musselburgh. Turnberry produced a **Balearic Shearwater** and 30 **Leach's Petrels** in 3 days with singles elsewhere on the east side. **Bewick's Swans** were at Cleish, Seafield Pond and the Hirsel. A huge count of 40,000 **Pink-footed Geese** was made at West Water. Single **Snow Geese** were noted at several sites. Three **Mandarins** at Eyemouth were probably escapes. Male **American Wigeons** appeared at Loch Fleet and Vane Farm. Imm **Ring-necked Ducks** were in Shetland and Orkney; the Loch Insh male also returned. A **Ferruginous Duck** was at Edgelaw and a female **King Eider** in Shetland; males were on Fair Isle and Loch Fleet. A male **Surf Scoter** was at Dunnet Bay, with an imm. at Loch Fleet, 3 males at Largo, a female at Tayport and 3 males off Gullane. **Smew** were scarce. A female **Ruddy Duck** visited Duddingston. Following a very large passage of **Long-tailed Ducks** through Shetland, record numbers appeared in the Forth.

American Robin *Sam Alexander*

A **Red Kite** was at Hunterston whilst **Rough-legged Buzzards** were more numerous than usual. A **Gyr Falcon** was seen on Stronsay. A **Pacific Golden Plover** was on Unst, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at Musselburgh, a **Great Snipe** on Stronsay, a **Long-billed Dowitcher** on Shetland, Scotland's first **Hudsonian Godwit** at the Slains and Shetland's second **Wilson's Phalarope** of the autumn on Unst.

Pomarine Skuas put in another good show. Single **Long-tailed Skuas** were recorded widely. **Mediterranean Gulls** were noted at Girdleness, Gullane, Seafield and St. Abbs. **Sabine's Gulls** flew past Fife Ness and Turnberry. The best counts of **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls** were 10 at Ullapool and 33 at Burrafirth. A fisherman reported an **Ivory Gull** 60 miles east of Yell. **Little Auks** appeared in quite large numbers.

A **Swift** at Inverness on 31 Oct. was late and it was a remarkable autumn for **Hoopoes** with 15 records.

There were 4 **Short-toed Larks** in Scotland but only one **Shore Lark** reported, at Rattray. A **Red-rumped Swallow** was at Kincorth. **Richard's Pipits** put in a good showing. Other rare Pipits included 3 **Olive-backed Pipits** and 3 **Red-throated Pipits** in Shetland and **Pechora Pipit** on Fair Isle. The **Waxwing** invasion began on the 23 Oct. High counts included 100 at Dingwall, 300 at Rosyth and 500 at Loanhead. Shetland saw 3 **Black-bellied Dippers.**

Arctic Warbler *Steve Brown*

Rare **Wheatears** put on a good show with a **Pied** on Stronsay and single **Deserts** in Shetland and South Ronaldsay. Massive falls of **thrushes** occurred from 13 to 22 Oct. The rarest thrush was an **American Robin** watched by about 200 people at Inverbervie on Boxing Day. The only **Icterine Warbler** was the first record for the Western Isles on North Uist. 20 **Barred Warblers** were seen from Shetland to St. Abbs. Single **Arctic Warblers** at Collieston and Skateraw in Oct. were late. **Pallas's Warblers** occurred in force. It was another good year for **Yellow-browed Warblers.** Single **Radde's Warblers** occurred at Scatness, Fair Isle, Stronsay, South Ronaldsay and St. Abbs, with **Dusky Warblers** at Virkie, Rattray, and, remarkably, Islay. **Goldcrests** featured heavily in late Oct. Barns Ness, St. Abbs and Eyemouth all produced single **Firecrests. Red-breasted Flycatchers** were recorded from Shetland to the English Border. Four **Long-tailed Tits** in Shetland were the first there since 1860.

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

Shetland's second **Isabelline Shrike** followed the first record in 1987, but **Red-backs** were scarce. **Great Grey Shrikes** were slightly more common. Scotland's second **Red-eyed Vireo** was on North Uist in Oct. **Mealy Redpolls** were scarce, but **Arctics** appeared in Shetland. Also in Shetland were 10 **Scarlet Rosefinches**. There was an influx of large, bright **northern Bullfinches** into the Northern Isles. **Hawfinches** also continued their good showing of recent years. **Lapland Buntings** were not numerous although widely scattered. North Ronaldsay produced a fine **Pine Bunting**. **Little Buntings** were seen in Shetland and Orkney. Benbecula gets its first mention in this report for many years with a superb **Northern Oriole** which spent several Oct. days there.

STOP PRESS

*A **White-billed Diver** in Scapa Flow, 2 drake **American Wigeons** in Shetland and another near Inverness in January, while the **Long-billed Dowitcher** continued to winter on Unst.*

Pete Ellis

Golden Eagle Print

Golden Eagle over Caenlochan

You may not be fortunate enough to have Golden Eagles in your Atlas tetrads but everyone can appreciate Keith Brockie's superb painting of an eagle soaring over Caenlochan's cliffs. Unfortunately we cannot print in colour or at full size, which is larger than SBN's pages. If you want to own one of a limited edition of 250 prints individually signed and numbered by Keith then all it will cost you is £20 post free from 21 Regent Terrace; a bargain when you consider the artist's growing international reputation. If you are able to call in at the Club you can see one on display. All profits go to Scottish ornithology.

Scottish eagles, including those in Caenlochan, are still under threat from deliberate poisoning – see back issues of SBN – and inappropriate developments in sensitive areas so, once you have bought your print, please read about the Save the Cairngorms Campaign on p.13. Raptors will be the theme of the Club's Conference on 10-12 November in North Berwick.

Overheard at St. Abbs

A. Birder:
"Look, there's a Red-breasted Flycatcher."

Mrs. Birder:
"But there isn't any red on its breast!"

A. Birder:
"Now there's a Red-backed Shrike."

Mrs. Birder:
"But there isn't any red on its back!"

A. Birder:
"Over there is a Barred Warbler."

Mrs. Birder:
"But it hasn't any bars on it. Why can't you give these birds sensible names?"

A. Birder:
"Stop embarrassing me in front of my friends."

Fair Isle at the Crossroads

Undoubtedly 1988 will be heralded as a watershed in the life and times of Fair Isle and its Bird Observatory. The SOC has always had exceptionally strong ties with FIBOT and we are delighted to be able to donate part of this issue of SBN to what is arguably the best known birdwatching site in Scotland.

With the provision of improved research and group accommodation and the ability to computerise the research data, the observatory has now the wherewithall to remain at the forefront of the leading observatories in the world. It is up to us all to ensure that the facilities are effectively used. During 1988 the NCC monitoring contract was concluded very satisfactorily, funds permitting the contract will be continued. FIBOT is particularly well placed to contribute to the debate on the decline of sea bird colonies in Shetland where the observatory's accumulated records are proving invaluable.

It is a pleasure to record the link up with the St. Andrew's University Biological Department for the computerisation of our records, which, we hope, will lead to closer collaboration between FIBOT and many educational establishments.

It is with gratitude that we say good-bye to Nick Riddiford as warden of FIBOT. Both Nick and Liz have contributed enormously to FIBOT over the years, and we wish them well in their new careers.

1988 was an eventful year, an exciting one in which the foundations for the future of FIBOT have been securely re-established. A full review of the Appeal and all it achieved will be included in the 1989 report. Looking back on the year, despite the concentration of attention of building works, it is the people of FIBOT that will be remembered, friends of Fair Isle, the staff and visitors and Fair Isle residents – without them all FIBOT would not be.

David Maclehose Chairman

The Observatory in the course of upgrading. The enlarged link block is now able to accommodate research workers. The original wood exterior is being covered by new block cladding. For details of how to visit the Bird Observatory write to FIBOT at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.

Highlights of 1988

At the end of every season the perennial question arises: was it the best year ever for birds on Fair Isle? Of course, that question is impossible to answer. It does, however, demonstrate one thing – that there is scarcely a dull moment from season to season, year in year out. Fair Isle goes from strength to strength.

Fair Isle is an isle of contradictions. It is an isle where Lanceolated Warblers are far commoner than Blue Tits; where "good" migration weather for the birdwatcher is exactly the reverse for the birds, sweeping them off-course or forcing them to interrupt their passage on the isle; and most of all where the unexpected is expected. 1988 was no exception.

The spring began in splendid fashion, south-easterly winds in late March diverting up to 1300 Blackbirds, 100 Woodcock and 670 Skylarks. Star bird was a Red Kite, the third Fair Isle record. In keeping with recent years, April was a good month for migrants with arrivals on many days and some early records. The best fall was on 19th-21st, resulting in counts of 320 Bramblings, 1500 Fieldfares, 260 Meadow Pipits, 135 Wheatears and a very impressive 50 Ring Ouzels. Wind direction is a major influence on numbers and variety of migrants, with winds from the eastern quarter most effective in diverting European migrants to us. Easterly winds towards the end of April were probably responsible for an unprecedented arrival of Grasshopper Warblers, peaking at 10 on 30th. Rarities during the month included the first Great Crested Grebe since 1982 and the rather commoner (!) Subalpine Warbler of the rarer eastern race.

May and June are always popular months. The whole period was interesting, but the most exciting days were 13th-14th May when arrivals included 30 Red-backed Shrikes, 55 Bluethroats, 35 Pied Flycatchers, 45 Redstarts, 500 Wheatears, 180 Tree Pipits, 4 Wrynecks and 7 Grey-headed Wagtails. Birds were everywhere, including on the cliffs, breeding plumage making their presence all the more memorable. Accompanying rarities were 2 Thrush Nightingales, 3 Subalpine Warblers, Short-toed Lark, Hoopoe, Little Bunting and Nightingale. Arctic Terns were showing great interest in Shalstane rock in the south and their activity drew a Roseate Tern on 12th, a first Fair Isle record. In late May and June quantity gave way to quality, though 7 Scarlet Rosefinches, 7 Red-backed Shrikes and 3 Marsh Warblers on 25th May were not insignificant counts. Late May saw several Dotterels, a Woodchat Shrike, 2 Honey Buzzards, 2 Golden Orioles, 2 Icterine Warblers, Quail, Corncrake and Great Reed Warbler. The early June roll of honour was headed by 3 Great Reed Warblers, 3 Woodchat Shrikes, Red-throated Pipit, Golden Oriole, Honey Buzzard and Quail. Up to 6 Red-backed Shrikes and 5 Marsh Warblers were also seen. A male Black-headed Bunting appeared on the 9th and 2 adult Long-tailed Skuas flew over on the 19th. Recent attention to surrounding waters has demonstrated an abundance of sea mammals off Fair Isle and an impressive series of cetacean sightings was made in 1988, leading off with a Pilot Whale seen from the *Good Shephered* mail boat on 28th May.

The sea has for some years been a major focus of our activities in another sphere, that of seabird monitoring. The logic of this became all too clear in 1988. All started well in the case of Arctic Terns which, with 345 nests in four acres, showed a 63.5% increase on 1987 figures. Initial euphoria soon faltered as severe food shortages became apparent from early July. First indications came from early failures, low chick weights and a decrease in the number of sandeels being brought in. Unfortunately sandeels have formed the basic diet for chicks of a large proportion of Fair Isle's seabirds in the past, so it was not surprising in July to find large scale chick mortality. Diving species fared better than surface feeders. The worst affected were the terns. Kittiwakes fared little better and visits to colonies were heart-rending; chicks of all ages lying dead or dying in nearly every nest, often with parents still in attendance as if oblivious of their fate. It was not all gloom, however. The Gannet colony continued to blossom, the number of nests increasing 60% to 488 and three-quarters successfully fledging chicks.

New Warden for Fair Isle

As we go to press we learn that Nick Riddifords' successor as Warden of the Bird Observatory is Paul Harvey. Paul was Assistant Warden in 1984 and 1985. Since then he has been NCC's Seasonal Warden on Noss National Nature Reserve and, latterly, an Assistant Regional Officer. Paul will take up his post at the end of March. Other news from Fair Isle is that the 1988 Annual Report is now available price £2.75 which includes postage, from FIBOT, 21 Regent Terrace.

Elsewhere singing Quails raised hopes of breeding but this was not established. Other July records included Honey Buzzard. Our seabird work continued in late July and August with some intensive night trapping of Storm Petrels at North Haven. Our rewards were 1000 captures, pride of place going to two Norwegian-ringed birds. In typical Fair Isle fashion the first migrant warblers (on 9th August) turned out to be rarities: Greenish and Barred Warblers. Barred Warblers, Scarlet Rosefinches and Wrynecks were seen regularly from mid month. A second Greenish Warbler appeared on 27th and Corncrake and Dotterel at the end of the month.

Strong easterlies on 2nd produced one of the largest early September falls in recent years. Present in force were 500 Meadow and 120 Tree Pipits, 170 Garden Warblers and 130 Willow Warblers, 100 Whinchats, 65 Pied Flycatchers, 35 Redstarts, 20 Lesser Whitethroats and 12 Wrynecks. Totals of 40 Common Sandpipers and 12 Red-backed Shrikes were record autumn counts. Another wave of arrivals on the 5th was spearheaded by 140 Whinchats and record numbers of 33 Little Stints and 36 Curlew Sandpipers. The rarity list of Citrine Wagtail, 2 Yellow-breasted Buntings, Lanceolated Warbler, 2 American Golden Plovers, Pectoral Sandpiper, King Eider and Short-toed Lark, was a typical Fair Isle September selection. Rarer than all was a Convolvulus Hawk Moth on 3rd, the first Fair Isle record. Gale force westerlies late in the month put a brake on passerine movement but seawatching provided ample compensation in the form of an unprecedented Long-tailed Skua passage, 19 being recorded in just over a week. Seven Pomarine Skuas were also seen, and 6 Pilot Whales on the *Good Shepherd* crossing.

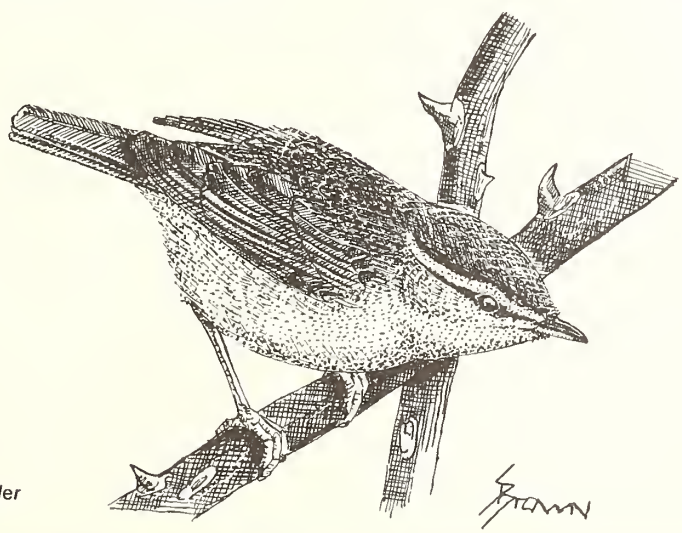
October was a phenomenal month, dominated by SE winds. Wave after wave of migrants included some unexpected multiple arrivals, most notably 16 Yellow-browed Warblers on the 4th (and a further 2 on the *Good Shepherd* in mid-crossing), 5 Red-breasted Flycatchers on the 7th, 4 Hawfinches (the first ever in autumn) on the 12th and 16 northern Bullfinches on the 24th. Common migrants were numerous all month and peak counts included 320 Goldcrests, 1500 Song Thrushes, 2500 Blackbirds, 6000 Redwings, 2200 Fieldfares and 200 Woodcock. However, the undoubted stars of October were the rarities. Fair Isle maintained its tradition of regularly adding to the British list with a stunning first-year male Blackburnian Warbler adorning the cliffs of Furse on 7th, the first of its kind to be recorded in the Western Palearctic. A Blyth's Pipit on 13th-22nd captured as many headlines, as a second for Britain and the first this century.

Fair Isle has a number of 'specialities', birds whose regular appearance on the isle contrasts with extreme rarity elsewhere. Three of these, Pechora Pipit, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler and Lanceolated Warbler, occurred in October and no less than 3 Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers and 2 Lanceolated Warblers (additional to the September bird) arrived in the space of a week. The multiple Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler arrival was unprecedented, bringing the number recorded on Fair Isle to 8. With a supporting cast including 4 Olive-backed Pipits, 4 Little Buntings, Fair Isle's second Radde's Warbler (just a year after the first), Rustic Bunting, 3 Short-toed Larks, King Eider, 4 Ortolans, at least 8 Red-breasted Flycatchers, at least 3 Richard's Pipits, 2 Long-tailed Skuas, 2 Spotted Crakes, Pectoral Sandpiper and Hoopoe October was indeed a rare treat and the only disappointment was that there were so few birdwatchers present to enjoy it.

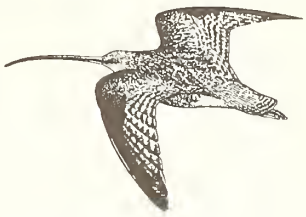
Most of the rarities had occurred by mid month, but heavy migration continued into November. It soon became clear that a number of northern species had experienced a good breeding season, and late autumn had a strong Scandinavian flavour. Irruptive migrants were represented by 2 Rough-legged Buzzards, at least 20 northern Bullfinches, 6 Hawfinches, 3 or 4 Great Spotted Woodpeckers, a Great Tit and the first Blue Tit since 1982. The best Waxwing invasion for nearly two decades began on 24th October and reached 69 bird/days by 21st November, with 28 passing through on the 2nd and 16 on 9 November. Long-eared Owl passage was another feature of November. Autumn sightings also including 3 Killer Whales in October and 18 Risso's Dolphins and 6 Sperm Whales in November.

Was 1988 the best year ever? Well, it was certainly non stop ..... but then so were previous years. For the unbiased observer 1988 will perhaps appear as yet another year when Fair Isle 'did it again'. The only comment I can make is that on this isle of contrasts, the ornithological unpredictability which makes Fair Isle so exciting is a safe prediction for the future. The best years are yet to come!

Nick Riddiford



Radde's Warbler
Steve Brown



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T & A D POYSER

Seabird Monitoring on Fair Isle

The numbers of many of Fair Isle's seabirds have been monitored since the early 1970s, firstly by means of June counts of Kittiwakes, Fulmar, Guillemot and Razorbill as part of the RSPB-Seabird Group scheme and secondly by counts of Puffin burrows in a standardized plots system which have formed part of my own long-term study of this species. The observatory has also participated in many nationwide surveys of breeding birds for example Gannet (1984-85), Arctic and Great Skua (1975-86).

In 1985, FIBOT reviewed its seabird work. This was an opportune moment for such an exercise because NCC/ITE were in the process of starting a scheme to monitor various aspects of seabird biology and were looking for colonies where this work could be carried out. Partly on the basis of data already collected by the Observatory, but more importantly because of the island's largely unrealised potential, Fair Isle was selected to become one of the four or five key seabird monitoring sites in Britain. Since then, NCC has given FIBOT a contract to undertake a clearly defined programme of work.

At present attention is focussed mainly on the Kittiwake, Shag, Fulmar and four species of auk. Each season information on population parameters and breeding biology is collected for a wide range of species. Specific aims of the work are to: –

(a) follow changes in numbers by counting sample plots each year and making whole island counts every 5 years,
(b) estimate adult survival rates and annual chick production,
(c) measure chick growth rates,
(d) quantify the diet of chicks.

The results obtained over the past three seasons show that, whilst numbers of some species have increased e.g. Kittiwake by 1.4% since 1986, Gannet by 60% between 1987 and 1988, numbers of other species have declined e.g. Razorbill by 13% since 1986 and Arctic Skua and Guillemot numbers are also falling.

The information on breeding success was of particular interest since further north in Shetland Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes had a disastrous season in 1988. Similar results were obtained on Fair Isle where only three young terns were reared although record numbers of Common Terns and Arctic Terns, nested. Kittiwake production was also down by 90% from 1987. In contrast to these surface feeding species, the breeding success of species which feed by diving remained high.

	1986	1987	1988	Feeding method
	Young fledged/pair			
Shag	1.47	1.20	1.30	Diving
Gannet	0.68	0.48	0.78	Plunge diving
Black Guillemot	?	0.48	0.57	Diving
Puffin	?	0.70	0.75	Diving
Kittiwake	1.02	1.00	0.09	Surface feeding
Fulmar	0.47	0.53	0.38	Shallow diving/ surface feeding

Previous studies on Fair Isle, Orkney and elsewhere in Shetland, have shown that sandeels are the staple food of most of these seabirds during the breeding season. The few samples obtained from Kittiwakes, Arctic Terns and Shags on Fair Isle in 1988 were again mainly composed of sandeels but Puffin showed a marked change in the food brought in for the chicks. Of 159 fish examined, 54% were species in the cod family *(Gadidae)*, mainly whiting with a few pout, 42% were sandeels and the rest were herring or sprat plus one minute flatfish. In six previous seasons since 1974 sandeels had never made up less than 75% of the fish brought in for the chicks. Although whiting has a much lower calorific value than sandeel, the change in diet did not seem to have a particularly adverse effect on Puffin breeding success.

After 1988's disastrous season there is considerable interest in what happens to Shetland's seabirds over the next few years and FIBOT's studies on Fair Isle will play a key role in documenting and understanding the situation.

Mike Harris

Puffin and Guillemot *Martin Hayes*

The Observatory and the Future

To many who visit the observatory its prime role is a recreational one. Whether their interest is simply in islands and a bit of peace and quiet, in watching seabirds or in twitching rarities, all can be sure of a memorable stay. Fair Isle is a particularly beautiful place to which many of us return repeatedly, with little idea when we arrive of what ornithological treats lie in store. A great attraction of the observatory is the wonderful variety of people that stay there, not all of them birders, and the latter varying from the raw beginner to the experienced professional. All of them are able to join in and contribute to the work. But, beyond its obvious recreational function, the observatory also has a useful role in the fields of research and education. In looking to the future it is these areas on which I would like to concentrate.

Three years ago the Directors of FIBOT set up a Research and Education Advisory Committee consisting of a number of individuals with first hand experience of the island, of education and of research as well as various combinations of the three! It's aim is to advise the Warden and Directors about all matters concerned with research and education in the hope that the bird observatory can perform the most useful possible role in these areas. Of course, all bird observatories are, to some degree, involved in both fields. The training of ringers and of observers in identification and field skills, though informal, are certainly educational. As far as research is concerned, the part that the observatories play in the ringing scheme makes an important contribution to this work. These activities have, at Fair Isle, been supplemented by occasional courses and by more direct involvement in research by the Warden to the limited extent that his other duties allowed. In earlier times Ken Williamson carried out his pioneering studies of drift migration on the island, and Peter Davis collaborated in a detailed study of the genetics and breeding biology of Arctic Skuas. Today it is not so easy for the Warden to find time for such work, yet the standing of the bird observatory as a leading international centre for ornithology depends upon it. It is our hope, therefore, to find ways of encouraging use of both the island and the bird observatory for various enterprises relevant to research as well as continuing to encourage use of the observatory for courses. Nick Riddiford has already run a number of courses for ringers and several courses for Y.O.C. members have been run by the R.S.P.B.

On the research front the big development in the last three years has been the involvement of the bird observatory in the N.C.C. funded national seabird monitoring programme. This holds exciting prospects for the future and ensures that the seabird work of the observatory is compatible with that elsewhere and so of maximum value. The work involved is considerable, but it is certainly not time wasted. All the observatory staff have been involved with this seabird work to a greater or lesser extent. Given current worries about the lack of breeding success of Shetland seabirds, this monitoring work is obviously extremely timely and important.

Shag *David Mitchell*

With many other demands on their time there is little scope for observatory staff to take part in other research projects. However, the island has immense potential for many different sorts of work; the shortage is certainly more of manpower than of ideas. Over the years a small but steady stream of visiting research workers has carried out studies on the island, such as those recently made by Peter Evans on Starlings and Adrian del Nevo on Guillemots, and the current study by Fiona Hunter on Fulmars. There is scope for more work by visiting scientists and we are anxious to encourage this, both for its own sake and because of the interest and stimulus that such people provide to staff and visitors at the observatory. It is obviously essential that research workers stay at the observatory but this has not always been possible in the past, both because of the expense involved in staying for long periods and because fieldwork schedules seldom fit in with the observatory routine. However, with new self-catering accommodation specifically for research workers, we are now in a position to encourage work on the island more actively, with the knowledge that there is plenty to attract fieldworkers to the island and that they can stay there relatively cheaply. Through a generous grant from the Carnegie Trust we also plan to install a computer at the observatory. This will be invaluable for visiting researchers as well as for its capacity to store data collected by the staff. The observatory has a large backlog collected over the past 40 years. This offers potential for studies of various sorts. Bird observatories are often accused of collecting a great deal of data which they never analyse and write up. At Fair Isle we are now in a position to set this to rights.

There is no doubt that, as it enters its fifth decade, Fair Isle Bird Observatory is alive and well, performing a useful function from the viewpoint of both research and education, as well as providing a wonderful place to visit simply for a holiday. But perhaps it should carry a Government Health Warning; it can become a permanent addiction.

Peter Slater

The strange migration of 5H3663

While the migration of much rarer species might occasionally reach the front pages of the national press, the strange movement of a Willow Warbler ringed on the Isle of May poses questions with no simple answers. 5H3663 was a first year Willow Warbler trapped on the Isle of May on 18 September 1986. When first caught it weighed 8.1 gms, about average for the species. Over the next few days it was retrapped no less than seven times, having taken up residence inside one of the Bird Observatory's Heligoland traps. When last handled, it weighed a healthy 9.6 gms on 23 September 1986, and was released by Gordon Anderson of Lothian Ringing Group at 14.15 hrs. Exactly twenty days later, on October 10, instead of being well into Africa where most sensible Willow Warblers spend the winter months, our little bird was shot on the north-west coast of Iceland, 1469 km from the Isle of May. Only light south-easterly winds on 24-26 September could have been responsible for this strange movement because, after that period, the country was back to a more usual westerly airstream. Willow Warblers are scarce migrants to Iceland, but the record is not completely unexpected. A Willow Warbler ringed on the May on 28 September 1983 was killed by a cat on Orkney, sixteen days later. The direction, if not the distance, was similar to that of 5H3663.

Bernard Zonfrillo

Two Buzzards mobbed by Merlin

On 8 July 1988 in a glen near Tyndrum, we observed an unusual interaction between a Merlin and two Buzzards. We had previously been watching a pair of Merlins flying around a small area of Caledonian pine forest calling in a rather agitated state. As we proceeded downhill, we saw two Buzzards hovering about 10 m apart some distance above the ground about 200 m away. Suddenly one of the Buzzards swung round with its talons to face an incoming Merlin. We observed about six more of these attacks. On each occasion the attacked bird would swing round to defend itself with its talons at the last moment. On one occasion the Merlin climbed rapidly to about 20 m above one of the Buzzards and stooped on it, but the Buzzard successfully avoided the attack. Despite the Merlin's very fast flight speed, the Buzzards appeared to have no difficulty in avoiding the attacks, though their aerial manoeuverability was noticeably poorer. After about 10 minutes the Merlin gave up its apparently fruitless attacks and flew off along the hillside and the Buzzards flew slowly towards the slopes of the opposite hill.

Records of Merlins attacking other birds in the air are not uncommon. For example, attacks have been recorded on a Short-eared Owl, Carrion Crow, Hen Harrier and Sparrowhawk, but we can find no record of a Merlin attacking two Buzzards. We were unable to ascertain whether the Merlins we were observing were also defending a nest which might explain their aggressive behaviour.

Andrew Kitchener & Bob McGowan

Birds and Botanists

The note on Eagle attacking ornithologist in *SBN* 11 reminded me of the days when I used to help the late Eddie Balfour with his work on Hen Harriers. Anyone ringing Hen Harriers will be aware of the need to protect themselves – some females being exceptionally bold in the defence of their young. However, Eddie sometimes used me quite deliberately as a "sacrificial victim". At that time he was colour ringing to identify different birds and the only good way of seeing these when the bird was in flight was when she attacked with legs extended. Having positioned himself with field glasses Eddie would send me in to the territory. Because I wear spectacles the strike was always from the rear and, as I reeled, Eddie would examine my neck unsympathetically and say "Oh, you're only bleeding a little bit", while I felt dizzy for the next hour! His well-known old black beret was a favourite target and many's the time I've watched him retrieving it from the heather when he was walking away from putting me on a hide. When the hen re-settled herself on the nest a few minutes later, I swear she had a self-satisfied smirk on her handsome brown face. All this activity on the part of the humans was properly licensed!

Most visitors to Hoy are scared of Bonxies. Working in pairs they make a formidable assault team. I've never been actually hit although very vulnerable as a ground-watching botanist. One couple, however, tried my patience too much while I was carrying out a fiddly piece of vegetation analysis. I left the plants to attend to the birds and, by crouching down with my walking stick between my knees, was able to launch an upthrust which missed one bird's belly by a feather. They left me alone to finish my work and, even when I had to return through their territory a couple of hours later, were still respectfully cautious.

Frankly, though, I'm glad to see birds retaliate effectively. However, courageous the smaller species may be, they cannot make much impression on the human body. We shouldn't get it all our own way.

It may seem unfair for a botanist to have had TWO sightings of a pair of Peregrines "buzzing" an eagle in one lifetime. Many years ago and, as I discovered later, running a high temperature, I was shakily hunting the base of a gully in Hoy for *Saxifraga oppositifolia*. It was a dreary February day, and my attention was largely on my feet, but something made me glance up the chimney-like gully, just in time to see the three birds silhouetted against the sky. In contrast a very hot summer trudge around Loch an Dithreibh brought me, in the late afternoon, to the block scree birchwoods below Beinn Loaghal, which I was supposed to be botanising. Through one gap in the trees I spotted an eagle lazily cruising along the cliff face. As before "something" made me look up at the next gap and there was the eagle making a hurried and undignified retreat under the wild attack of a couple of Peregrines. I've never been sure if it was my imagination – I'm *not* an ornithologist – but I fancied the larger bird was making faintly pathetic mewing sounds. Botanists are not much given to looking upwards and on each occasion I did, at just the right moment.

Elaine Bullard

The Tay Ringing Group

In 1968, before Tayside existed as a Region, a handful of Angus, Fife and Perthshire ringers debated an appropriate name for a co-operative venture in ringing and studying birds. Considering the subsequent travels of Group members in pursuit of their quarry; to the Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, Norway, Iceland, Svalbard, France and even England, the title of Tay Ringing Group may seem a little parochial. In 1968, however, there seemed to be scope aplenty on either bank of the river, with little thought of the need or desire to travel beyond our own doorstep. Indeed much of the Group's activity, with many long and short-term projects in progress, is still focused on the Tay Area.

Over the past 20 years, individuals have joined the group and some have moved on, so the membership has remained steadily at between 20 and 30 ringers and trainees. There has been a hard-core membership involved from the beginning, and it is perhaps remarkable that of the six contributors to the first published report in 1971, four are still associated with the Group.

Since the earliest days Group members have had wide ranging interests, from rocky shore and estuarine species to the birds of the high tops and everything in between. The absence of workable sea-bird colonies inthe Group's area was overcome by the study of Cormorants in the Firth of Forth, and by a regular and continuing commitment to the Isle of May Bird Observatory where experience in handling unusual species can be regarded as a valuable additional facet of the 'complete ringer's' training. Trainees now have the opportunity to gain experience with all the major British bird groups.

While many Group members have their own particular interests, there is rarely any shortage of volunteers to help out with the larger scale wader, hirundine and Sedge Warbler exercises which are essentially group activities. It is tempting to speculate that it is the commitment to common purpose and individual activities which has kept the group thriving for over twenty years.

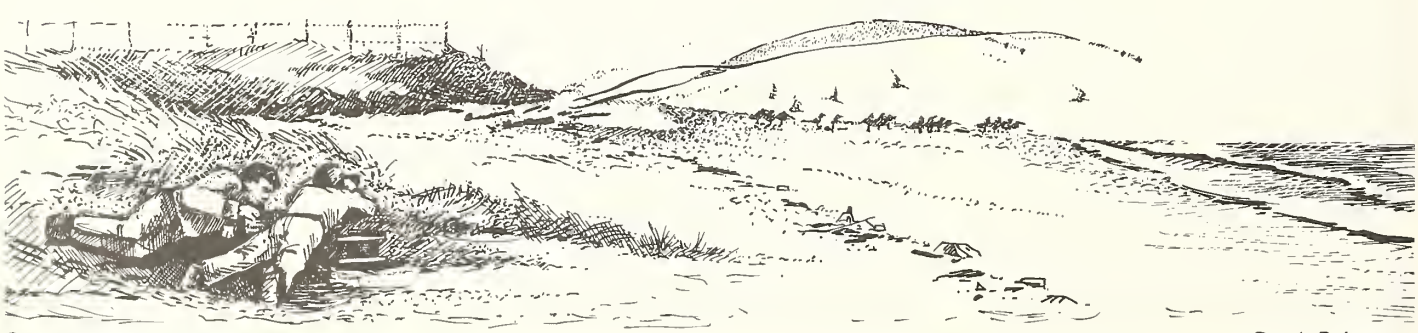
By the end of 1987, over 160,000 birds of 162 species had been ringed, with the annual total in recent years consistently in excess of 10,000 individuals. A scanning of the ten TRG Reports provides an insight to the changing interests of members. Some birds, such as the Dipper, have been inherited as study species by a succession of newly qualified ringers. There may be an occassional lean year with only a few birds ringed, each ringer focusing on the species does not have to start afresh, with an assured proportion of the population marked, and many retrap records on file. The total number is in excess of 3,000, with over 2,000 ringed as nestlings. Although the survival rate of the young may be low ringed pulli provide the most valuable information as we know exactly where they came from.

Blue Tit in mist net *Derek Robertson*

Finches such as the Chaffinch and Greenfinch have featured highly in some years, as they feed in restricted areas, limited by snowfall. The astonishing increase nationally in numbers of Siskin ringed is paralleled in the Group's ringing records, as the birds have adapted to specialise in garden feeding. This has enabled us to contribute to the knowledge of the wintering, passage and breeding areas as they pass through Tayside en route from southern England to the Highlands (and elsewhere?). With the exception of the Siskin, garden bird ringing has been of limited interest to the Group. Typical garden birds, the Blue and Great Tits have, however, long been of interest in their 'wild' habitats, through a series of nest box studies. Nest boxes have provided the opportunity to contribute to our knowledge of two other passerines, the Pied Flycatcher and Redstart. The latter is unusual in the scale in which it has taken to our boxes, with almost 300 birds ringed near Loch Katrine in 1987, from our grand total of over 2,000 ringed. In the same area the Pied Flycatcher provides another success story. During the original Breeding Atlas survey a single Pied Flycatcher sighting initiated the development of a nest box study. Up to 400 birds are now ringed annually.

The TRG is best known for its wader ringing activities, the results of which have, from the earliest days, featured prominently in the ringing totals and written papers and reports. Twenty-four species have been handled by the Group and totals include as many pulli as full-grown birds. Without doubt the Purple Sandpiper is the bird we have pursued most diligently over the years. From a wintering bird caught on the Isle of May in the late 60's and subsequently recovered on its south Norwegian breeding ground has developed a fascinating study of the origins of the various populations wintering in Scotland. Group members have been involved in a series of visits to Norway. As a result of colour-ringing breeding Purple Sandpipers we have generated a series of winter sightings in east Scotland and N.E. England (some individuals over a period of years) of marked birds, for whom a life-history can be charted. From the 1970's we have been aware that there are at least two distinct populations of Purple Sandpipers wintering in the east of Scotland. We recognised this through examining biometrics, in particular the bill length, which suggested that the bulk of east coast birds belong to the breeding population in Norway. However there is also a population of larger birds of unknown origin. Realising this, Group members carried out detailed sampling of populations wintering in Orkney and the Hebrides, and showed that the populations here had proportionately more of the larger birds and few small, Norwegian birds. In an effort to track down the origin of the larger birds group members have studied breeding birds in Iceland and Svalbard, but to no avail, as the results indicate these birds do not winter in Britain! Having eliminated certain populations, the hunt continues.

While ringing provided the initial focus for most of our activities, Group members have always engaged in a wide variety of ornithological interests. Visiting Heron or Peregrine nests to ring chicks is combined with the collection of prey remains and hatched egg shells; thus contributing to our knowledge of food sources and the potential effect of pollutants. The interest in the Purple Sandpiper has led to detailed surveys of the rocky



Cannon-netting waders *Derek Robertson*

shore environments from Berwick to Dounreay, and in the Orkney and Shetland Islands. Indeed Group members pioneered the recording techniques utilised in the 1984-5 British Trust for Ornithology/Wader Study Group national survey of rocky shore species. By extending its interests beyond Tayside the group has joined forces with other groups studying birds and has participated in joint ventures with the Grampian, Highland, Orkney and Northumbrian Ringing Groups and the Shetland Bird Club.

Bird-ringers are sometimes criticised for failing to make best use of the data they accumulate, and most accept that there is little justification for disrupting the lives of birds by catching them unless we can hope to contribute to knowledge, or conservation. TRG members have long prided themselves on their commitment to the 'writing-up' of projects, originally in our own newsletters and Group Reports, but increasingly through publications with a wider readership. Many of the birds handled by the Group are 'priority' species, those which the Nature Conservancy Council have identified as of particular interest on a national scale, eg waders, raptors, various warblers, chats and seabirds. In recent years between 25 and 40% of our annual totals have been of these priority species. Worthy of mention are the Sedge Warblers caught mainly in Tay reed beds. Intensive Group effort has resulted in around 1,000 birds per annum being caught in recent years, producing large quantities of local retrap data, and over 70 longer distance recoveries.

It is the long distance recoveries which generate the greatest interest. So far, of 160,000 birds of 162 species ringed, we have recoveries reported for over 3,500, of 121 species. Predictably, large species are much more likely to be recovered than small ones. 261 Grey Herons have been reported from 3,188 ringed; a recovery rate of about 8%. One of these refers to the only British recovery in Africa of a British ringed heron. At the other end of the scale we have had only 16 recoveries from almost 5,000 Willow Warblers; at 0.33% the rate is higher than the national average of 0.24%. Nonetheless it is rewarding to retrap a bird weighing only a few grammes at the same site 12 months later, knowing that in the intervening period it has been to Africa and back. For the ringer the most significant recoveries are often the least surprising and impressive because they follow an emerging pattern. Yet we all look forward to the recoveries of spectacular migrants, as with our two Ruff recoveries, one in Russia and the other in Mali, representing the two ends of the migration route.

The lives of birds are continually changing in our modern world, particularly in response to the way we alter or disrupt the environment. Birds, being big, obvious and relatively easy to study are a very good indicator of environmental health. We hope through our activities, both from ringing and surveys, we can maintain a watchful eye on the ever changing scene within Tayside, and beyond. Perhaps our most bizzare recovery to date was the Great Tit that died as a result of consuming rat poison, which had been laid to prevent 'vermin' eating bird food!

Mike Martin

For more information on the T.R.G. contact Steve Moyes, 8 Grays Lane, Dundee DD2 3AN or phone 0382-612 643.

Poetic Licence

The International Burns Federation has recently officially registered the coat of arms of our greatest poet. This was devised by Robert Burns himself and prominently features, of all things, a Woodlark. Was this present day vagrant to Scotland common in the west of the country and well-known to Burns 200 years ago?

Well, a record of the Woodlark is noted in the *Statistical Account of the County of Ayrshire* (1837) and R. Gray *(Birds of the West of Scotland,* 1871) mentions several records of the species throughout Scotland. This latter author, while convinced that the bird occurred in Scotland, is unsure of the authenticity of many early records and certainly does not indicate that it was common anywhere. If Burns was familiar with the Woodlark then the chances are he would have known it from Ayrshire and/or Dumfriesshire. All early evidence of the species' occurrence in these counties, however, has been rejected by E.R. Paton and O.G. Pike *(The Birds of Ayrshire,* 1929) and H.S. Gladstone *(Birds of Dumfriesshire,* 1910). Gladstone states: "The most common name in this county for the Tree-Pipit is the "Wood-Lark", and this fact accounts for the numerous reports of the occurrence locally of a species which has hitherto only occurred in Scotland at Fair Island."; and: "There is no satisfactory evidence as to the occurrence of this species in the county, and I have no doubt that the older records of the "Wood-Lark" refer to the Tree-Pipit". Paton and Pike, in rejecting Woodlark records from Ayrshire, also note that the local name for the Tree Pipit in that county was Wood-Lark.

The bird on Burns coat of arms

It is possible, of course, that Burns really did want *Lullula arborea* on his coat of arms, but can we be sure that he didn't mean *Anthus trivialis?* As the bard himself never wrote:

A heraldic mark
Maun aye be tappit
But gie me a lark
— No' a pipit

Jim Reid

Aquatic Jay

While enjoying a picnic at the side of the Loch of the Lowes a Jay flew across the road. Suddenly the air was full of small birds flying in all directions and a young bird was fluttering in the water. The Jay swooped down to take the bird, missed and returned to a branch. Once again he swooped, this time picking it up and flying off. How the bird got into the water I don't know – perhaps knocked in by the Jay. It may have been a young Great Tit as there were several in the area.

Rhoda Cleghorn

Ayrshire Branch Members' Night

Ayrshire Branch had arranged to gift an oak tree at the Auchencruive Arboretum on Members' Night, generously for the benefit of wildlife, but also, selfishly, for the publicity in the local press.

On that bright, pleasantly warm September evening, we donnered down to the Arboretum. Through the window of the closed office, we could see the coveted ceremonial spade but there was no sign of the organiser to lead the proceedings. Aimlessly, we searched among the wood for the SOC label on an oak tree. Maybe we could chuck a few clods at it. Assuredly, not to be able to locate something as large as a tree, is a greater affront than dipping out on a wee bird. Embarrassment for the secretary was heightened when the local press photographer arrived to find members displaying the displacement behaviour of dittering about, or berating the secretary.

A college gardener appeared on the scene, explaining the organiser's car had broken down. Remarks rife, the Chairman was handed a make-do dirty old spade to use just as darkness was descending and photography light poor.

The report in the local press was entitled, 'Heart of Oak'. However those in the know realise we planted a lime tree in the chaos of that night.

Footnote: to make amends, the Auchincruive Arboretum organiser has promised to give us the delight of another tree planting ceremony.

Eleanor Hissett

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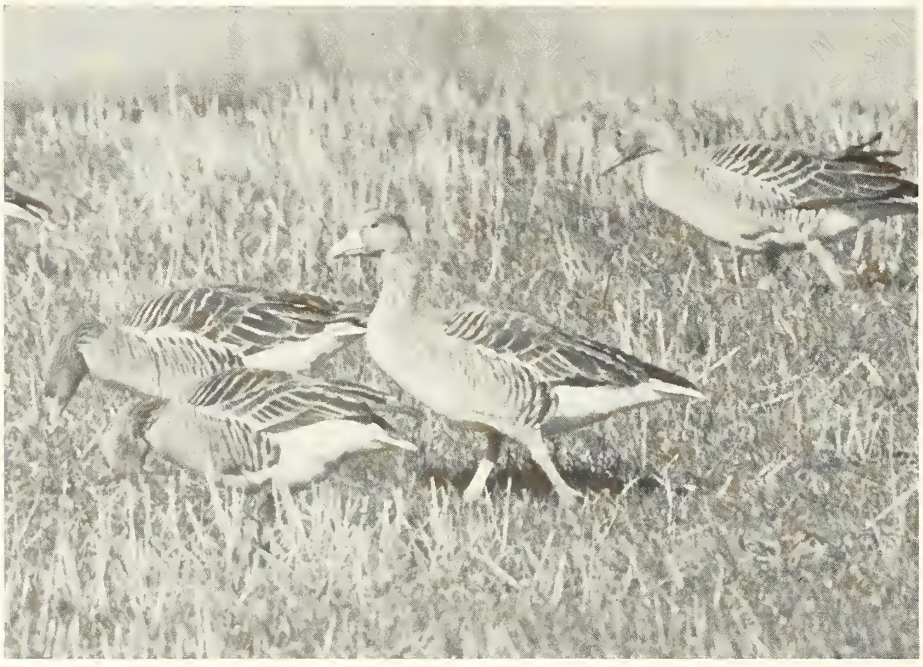
Spring Counts of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese in Britain, 1988



Grazing Greylags *Bobby Smith*

The monthly wildfowl counts, organised by the Wildfowl Trust under contract to the NCC cannot adequately cover certain species of swans and geese which feed by day well away from water bodies. Special surveys of these species are therefore undertaken, combining counts of birds on fields and flighting into and out of roosts. Pink-footed and Greylag Geese have been surveyed in this way each November since 1960, and also in March from 1961 to 1967 and from 1982 to 1986. The need to monitor changing distribution and to identify areas of particular importance during return passage prompted the organisation in 1988 of spring counts of Pinkfeet and Greylags in both March and, for the first time, April. The feral and native populations of Greylags were omitted, except where the former overlap with the wintering population in Galloway. The November 1987 counts had found 172,000 Pinkfeet and 105,000 Greylags, the latter figure is considered to be much lower than the true population level. In the absence of a tour to fill in gaps in eastern Scotland, coverage in March was not as good as in November. In particular, some parts of the Moray Firth were not covered in March. In April, however, there were very few gaps, although most of the north-west coast of Scotland, along which some geese are thought to migrate, was not covered. Pinkfeet and Greylags are much more dispersed towards the end of the season that in the autumn, so the relatively low totals found in March and April are not surprising. For both species the March count was roughly half that in November. The higher number of Pinkfeet found in April than March reflects the improvement in coverage in that month. The total Greylag count in April, however, was extremely low, and it is probable that large numbers had already left the country during the very mild spell immediately before the count. Greylags are known to disperse more than Pinkfeet during the winter and also to leave Britain earlier. Since the November count, which was much lower than expected, was written up it has been learnt that the Greylags were very late leaving Iceland, many not doing so until early December in view of mild conditions in their lowland nesting areas. It would appear that some Greylags only stayed in Britain for a matter of three or four months. For comparison, the totals counted in March 1986 were 97,000 Pinkfeet and 51,500 Greylags.

Any site regularly holding 1,000 of either Pinkfeet or Greylags is regarded as of international importance. Thirty eight such sites held over 1000 geese in spring 1988, four of them not known before. All but four of these important sites were in Scotland. The remarkable total of 42,600 Pinkfeet (a quarter of this season's entire population) were found on the lochs of Slains and Strathbeg, 30km apart, in April.

Although most counts were of roosts many observers noted different feeding habits in spring to November. The chief changes were to grass in March and newsown barley in April. Several counters noted that geese were more scattered and fed at a greater distance from the roost in spring than autumn. Two observers in northern Scotland stated that geese stopped off for longer on spring migration that in autumn.

	PINKFEET			GREYLAGS		
	Nov 1987	March 1988	April 1988	Nov 1987	March 1988	April 1988
Orkney	0	0	0	1300	2100	300
Caithness	0	10	60	3340	5000	4100
Wester Ross/W Sutherld	0	0	0	0	50	30
Moray Basin	30	490	18400	35100	8200	9200
Banff & Buchan	11500	8500	22300	7400	2800	400
Gordon	8800	10400	21700	8400	3500	240
Kincardine & Dee	0	750	650	8100	2600	950
Angus	53700	4500	6100	6300	470	490
Perth & Kinross	31700	15700	11600	13200	7900	1500
Central	0	2100	3600	260	200	1
Fife	6100	4000	54	100	320	30
Lothian	15500	2900	9300	1500	540	50
Borders	19400	10900	6900	3700	3	0
Strathclyde	3500	800	160	5100	5200	620
Cumbria/Dumf & Gall	2100	19300	12700	5400	9800	1600
Lancashire	16500	4600	1100	0	0	0
Northumberland	30	1	0	5800	3500	20
Humb/Lincs/Norfolk	3100	910	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	172000	85800	114600	105000	52100	19500

Many counters provided data on numbers after the April count. Information was also received from 35 members of the public and two SOC members who were not already counters. Although far from complete, and not tied to specific dates, this exercise produced valuable data on the patterns of movement and departure towards the breeding grounds.

On the south shore of the Solway there were still 1,000 Pinkfeet on 3 May. The last left Wigtown Bay on 12 May. On 2 May 500 were seen moving north over Glen Falloch, just north of Loch Lomond. There were many reports of Pinkfeet flying north over Perthshire between 19 and 28 April. At Montrose Basin there was a gradual departure until 16 May. The main exodus from the Slains Lochs began on 21 April, when the numbers declined to 10,000. Most of the remainder left on 26 April and only 2,100 remained on 3 May. By 20 May they had gone. The major departure from the Loch of Strathbeg was at a similar time. In the vicinity of Loch Spynie, near Lossiemouth, the numbers of Pinkfeet built up from 1,250 on the mid-April count to 3,000 on 22nd, suggesting passage from further south, but they declined markedly thereafter. The existence of a westerly migration route was shown by observations of a total of 1,600 Pinkfeet flying north over the Uists on 19 April and 260 northwest in three different localities in Wester Ross in early May.

The Bute Greylags had gone by the first week of May. In mid-April several small parties were reported moving north in the Oban area, and large numbers in Strathearn. In the Uists a total of 129 at two sites on 5 April were considered to be migrants, while over 300 were seen moving north later in the month. Mid-Deeside Greylags had left by 26 April. None were seen at the Loch of Strathbeg after 100 on the mid-April count. Most department from the Spynie area on 21 April and from Caithness in the week after the April count, when the weather improved, although 3,000 were still present on freshly sown barley near Loch Scarmclate on 21 April. In Orkney, 28 Greylags were still present on Sanday on 13 May.

THANKS to the many SOC members whose work forms the basis for this article.

David Salmon

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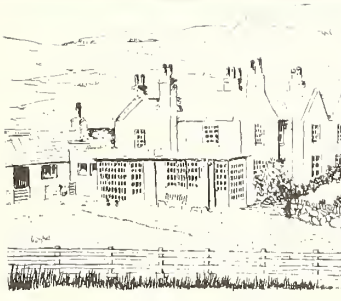

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist — almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

There are no day-trippers, no caravanners, etc., but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating and private facilities). Drive on-off car and passenger ferry ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Dinner, accommodation and breakfast from £35.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three luxury self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £70.00 weekly. Also special demi-pension arrangements for Field Study parties from £9.25 daily. Details on request.

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Upland Research for Bird Conservation

The Scottish uplands are of considerable ornithological importance and many of Britains rarest or most confined birds species occur on these upland or moorland habitats. 'Uplands' range from the montane plateaux of the central highlands to the heather-dominated grouse moors and acid grasslands of eastern and central Scotland, to the near-natural blanket bogs of Caithness and Sutherland, the Flow Country, which have never held appreciable forest cover since the last ice age. Each of these habitats has a characteristic land use history and their present bird fauna reflects past management or human influence to differing degrees.

The NCC's Moorland Bird Study has surveyed moorlands for breeding waders and other moorland birds in many areas of Scotland and northern England since 1979. The initial surveys in Caithness and Sutherland culminated last summer with the publication of the major report *Birds, Bogs and Forestry*. This documented the numbers and distribution of the assemblage of birds breeding on these internationally important peatlands, and considered the adverse effects of recent large-scale afforestation. In particular it identified the international importance of the area for its numbers of Greenshanks, Dunlins, Golden Plovers and several other waterfowl and raptors. Further moorland surveys have been undertaken on the more maritime peatlands of Shetland, on the Lewis blanket bogs, in the Campsie Fells/Touch Hills area of central Scotland, and on the grouse moors of Perthshire and the Grampian highlands. Earlier surveys were undertaken in the Borders and Northumberland as well as substantial areas of the Pennines and Welsh hills.

In all these areas, importance has been attached not only to estimating numbers and densities of birds, but also to understanding those features of the moorland vegetation which are attractive to different species of breeding wader. In this way, there is now a much better understanding of which plant communities are attractive to breeding waders and which are avoided. This information can then be used to manage uplands appropriately.

There is an increasing conservation need for wide scale information on moorland birds. Extensive afforestation of grouse moors, and other upland areas, with conifers continues in Scotland. This coniferous afforestation has adverse effects on the birds of open ground habitats and in many areas, important moorland habitat which once held considerable numbers of Golden Plover, Dunlin, Greenshank, Grouse and other moorland birds have now been converted to extensive coniferous plantations (see *SBN* 3 pages 8-9).

Curlew *Martin Hayes*

New plantations contain a bird fauna composed of relatively common passerines and such artificial habitats are no substitute for the moorlands and peat-bogs they replace. Additionally, plantations in many areas have had adverse effects on freshwater birds due to acidification of water-courses and nutrient pollution as a result of run-off. However, the rate of new afforestation is such that demand for information on moorland bird populations outstrips NCC's ability to obtain it using traditional methods of ground survey. Satellite photographs are currently being used to obtain information on numbers and habitats of moorland breeding birds over wide areas of the uplands in the Grampians and the northern Pennines.

Surveys of birds on selected sites have been undertaken last summer by teams who also recorded detailed information on moorland vegetation. Numbers and distribution of many moorland birds are affected by vegetation characteristics. An obvious example is the traditional burning small areas of heather as management for Red Grouse. These mosaics of heather patches are also attractive to breeding waders such as Golden Plovers, whilst it is well known that very wet areas with pools are favoured by Dunlin. Such patterns of vegetation show up clearly on satellite photographs. By relating bird distribution to vegetation, the work aims to scale up results from sample survey sites over wider areas of uplands. The results will be developed into a technique to enable reliable wide-scale assessment of moorland bird habitats.

The moorland surveys have not covered the montane plateaux which are the subject of another major NCC project (described in *SBN* 4 pages 6-7). Intensive work on the ecology and breeding of Dotterel, Snow Bunting and Ptarmigan by Dr Hector Galbraith and his team has led to a better understanding of the factors influencing the distribution and abundance of these birds of the high tops as well as the range of threats to their survival.

A three year NCC study investigated the effects of differing land-uses on the breeding density and success of Golden Eagles throughout the Scottish Highlands. In their report published last year, Dr Jeff Watson and co-authors considered that new afforestation posed a continuing threat to the survival of the Scottish Eagle population. They also showed the differing effects that summer and winter food supplies have on Eagle breeding densities and breeding success. Monitoring of Eagles at a number of sites continues and will lead to a better understanding of the long-term factors influencing this population, which remains the healthiest in Europe.

All these projects have demonstrated that, although the Scottish uplands may seem unchanging and unchanged, they are vulnerable to inappropriate management even though such effects may take a long time to become obvious. This in turn can have adverse effects on the populations of their many characteristic and often scarce birds. The challenge comes in using these research results to formulate appropriate policies that will ensure the conservation of highland birds in a changing social and economic environment.

David Stroud

Raven *Andy Dowell*

David Stroud is a member of the NCC's Moorland Bird Study Team based at Peterborough.

NCC Research into Low Density Agriculture

Changes in agriculture, such as cutbacks in production, set-aside and the support system for farmers will create many opportunities to improve wildlife conservation – but could also result in some threats. With this in mind, the Nature Conservancy Council has launched a major national research project to gain a better understanding of low intensity agriculture, particularly for birds, in order to produce a conservation strategy to maximize the benefits of these future changes.

Many birds depend upon farming land. Examples are the Barn Owl, Corncrake, Chough, many predators such as Hen Harrier and Merlin and a range of waders, such as Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank and Snipe.

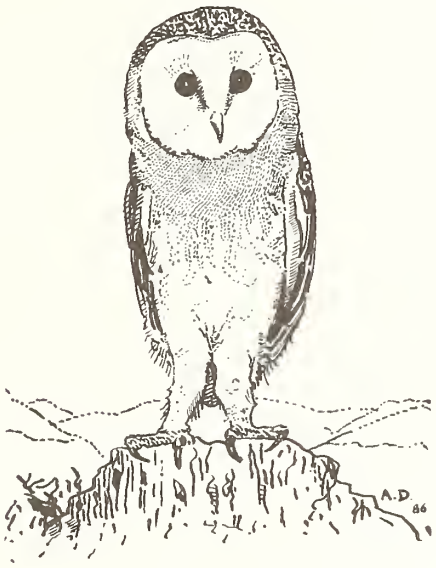
Dr Mike Pienkowski, Head of NCC's Ornithology Branch says "NCC want to halt further losses of wildlife due to intensive agriculture. But we also want to ensure that farming systems which are currently in harmony with wildlife are maintained. These could be used as examples of where farmers and conservationists are seen to work on the same side – to protect rural communities, together with the landscapes and wildlife associated with them."

The research team consists of four people. Dr Bignal of the NCC Chief Scientist's Directorate, is joined on the NCC staff by Mandy Wilson, a recently appointed ornithologist who will be based at the NCC office at Leyburn, North Yorkshire. A major part of the data handling and analysis of the research is being contracted to Paisley College of Technology, where it will be run by Dr David Curtis, a senior lecturer and research biologist, and Chris Moor, a research assistant.

Save the Cairngorms Campaign

The Cairngorms are the most important mountain system in Britain for nature conservation. The Cairngorms are also very popular with walkers, climbers and ski tourers who are attracted by the wildness of the mountains.

Because of the harsh climate and poor soils, the Cairngorm plateau is a very fragile ecosystem susceptible to damage by trampling. However roads and ski lifts built since the 1960's make access to the plateau easier and have increased the number of people going there. The recreational activity that makes the most impact is downhill skiing: ski lifts, buildings, access roads, snow fencing and groomed pistes are permanent features. Developments over the past few years, whether forestry, hill tracks or downhill skiing, have slowly eaten into the core of the Cairngorms so that the amount of remote land has been significantly reduced.



Barn Owl *Andy Dowell*

The Cairngorm Chairlift Company have plans to extend the downhill skiing area westwards below the Northern Corries into Lurchers Gully. This would involve an access road with associated snow fencing, and new ski lifts and buildings in the Gully. A public inquiry in 1981 looked into the issue of ski development here. The outcome was that the Secretary of State for Scotland decided not to allow it.

The Save the Cairngorms Campaign wants to see a coherent policy for the management of the Cairngorms as a whole and believes that the Northern Corries area, including Lurchers Gully, is too valuable in scenic, recreational, scientific and educational terms to allow downhill ski development. The Campaign is not objecting to ski development eastward into Coire Laogh Mor. The Campaign believes that downhill skiing is one of many competing interests, and does not want irretrievable mistakes made for short term gain.

If you wish to help the campaign you should raise the issue as soon as possible with your MP & MEP, the planning authority: **Director of Planning, Highland Regional Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness** and **The Secretary of State for Scotland: Scottish Development Department, New St. Andrews House, Edinburgh** and/or send donations to: **Save the Cairngorms Campaign, PO Box 39, Inverness IV1 2RL.**

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The louping doctor of North Uist

Louping ill virus is one of the tick borne group that act fiercely on the central nervous system giving encephalitis. The vector for transfer of louping ill is a tiny tick. In certain areas of high tick density sheep and deer are thought of as being the animals usually affected, but the grouse also sufer heavily. In 1978, W H Reid and others showed that in tick infested areas, as many as 84 per cent of adult grouse showed antibody to louping ill virus, but only 10 per cent in areas where the tick was less common. This fits with the study by Dr Denis Branagan, who has shown almost exactly similar figures for the sheep in areas of North Uist. This may be the reason that no matter how often grouse are introduced to North Uist, the population never builds up to shootable levels.

Although it was Reid and colleagues from the Moredun Institute in Edinburgh who published the major work on louping ill in grouse, a lot of research had been done previously by the recently retired doyen of virology in the North of Scotland – Dr Harry Williams of Raigmore hospital. Many years ago when he was pursuing his research and, of course, as a side-line it was not easy to raise any money to support it, he had an inspiration. He was the secretary of the local British Medical Association division, and as their annual dinner was within the grouse season, he decided that this was what the doctors and their wives would eat. The caterers were happy to hand over the bird's heads and so his research took a big leap forward.

So, why should I as a practitioner in Lochmaddy on the Isle of North Uist in the Western Isles, where there is no formal grouse shooting, have this interest and knowledge?

The reason is that I myself had louping ill in August 1984, and when lying rather unwell in Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow, Dr Ian Reid of the Department of Infectious Diseases came to visit me and brought me the reference to the published work on grouse. I had lots of talks with Dr Williams about the disease and his long-term work on it. Since being ill, I have tracked down a small group of people in my own area who have also had the disease. I have interviewed them, exchanged details with them and hope that another few winter evenings will see my first draft of a paper for possible future publication.

John Macleod

Grampian Branch Lochinver Weekend

As always, this was a great weekend. It started off well for the Duncan/Doyle contingent with an Osprey 30 feet overhead at that well known eating establishment, The Little Chef at Forres. Other birds seen over the weekend included Golden Eagle, Peregrine, all three divers, Grasshopper Warbler and a possible Little Auk. Disappointingly, the number of divers was down on previous years. As usual, people went their various ways on Saturday and Sunday. Some just three miles down the road to Inverkirkaig, well worth a walk, while that intrepid girl, Gillian, went all the way to Ben Hope and got Snow Buntings and Margaret Swallow went up Ben More Assynt (Munro bagging) and got Dotterel! The food this year was the best ever – no contretemps at the Culag! We all went to Chez Angela and Doug which was splendid. We have already written to the man from Egon Ronay. This annual event never fails to please and give good birding. Many thanks to Doug and Angela Mainland.

Alistair Duncan

Marathon Woodcock incubation period

On April 1, 1988, Mrs Mary-Ann McAllister flushed a Woodcock from a pile of brushwood in a disused garden in Colonsay. Beneath the brushwood was a nest with four eggs. She checked the nest sometime later and found the bird had returned.

I saw an adult Woodcock with two well grown young in the vicinity on May 2 and later mentioned this to Mary-Ann who said that her bird was still sitting. By then it was obvious that the eggs would not hatch and we were interested to see just how long the bird would continue to incubate. The bird got used to Mary-Ann's visits and allowed her to get close enough to pull back the rapidly growing vegetation in order to see it. On June 16, I photographed the bird from less than 2 metres while Mary-Ann held the nettles back. Our first attempt failed when the nettles slipped, hitting the bird and causing it to fly off. Within half an hour it had returned and we took several pictures before leaving the bird to continue incubating. Mary-Ann last saw the bird on June 18 – it was not there on June 20.

From the above dates the Woodcock was incubating for at least 79 days. In *BWP* Vol. III Cramp & Simmons, quote 21-24 days for normal incubation.

John Clarke

Incubating Woodcock *Derek Ratcliffe*

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 April for the June number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries - and suggestions - will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in *SB 14(1)*.

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult £12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Reviews

Biographies for birdwatchers *by Barbara and Richard Mearns; Academic Press; 1988; 490 pp, 77 portraits, 109 drawings, 11 maps; £17.50.*

This is a fascinating book. It describes the travels and the lives of the ornithologists and naturalists after whom western palearctic birds have been named. I had no idea that there were 91 of them! All are included in Barbara and Richard Mearns' book. I was particularly interested in the accounts of George Montagu (of Montagu's Harrier), and of Canon Tristram, born near Alnwick in Northumberland, who published *The Fauna and Flora of Palestine* in 1884, after whom three Middle Eastern birds are named, and of Pallas, Steller and others who travelled in the Soviet Union and Sibera about whom I knew almost nothing. Each 'memoir' is four to ten pages in length, and this makes for good bedside reading. The scraperboard drawings of the birds by Darren Rees are beautifully done.

William G. Harper

MA

Ayrshire Summer Shorebirds, Ayrshire Winter Shorebirds; *with Angus Hogg & Ken Jackson; Sounds Natural; £4.60 per cassette*

Shorebirds are interpreted widely to include everything from the Gannets of Ailsa Craig to songbirds singing in coastal woods and some scarcer species such as Glaucous Gull and Twite. Sound quality is very good, reflecting the expertise of the recorder who is also a BBC producer. This radio background also seems to have influenced the format which has more human voice overs than usual on bird recordings; when I listened to the tapes in a car I kept thinking I was listening to one of the better programmes from a series like the Living World. This approach allows Angus Hogg to put over a lot of points about identification other than by calls or song, useful as so many coastal species are not usually identified by voice alone. It is, perhaps, a shade overdone as listeners are unlikely to want to hear about the weather or the name of the boatman every time they play the tapes. The SOC is mentioned and the tapes certainly provide pleasant listening for anyone birdwatching in or around Ayr.

These tapes are on sale in Ayrshire shops or from Sounds Natural, Upper End, Fulbrook, Oxford OX8 4BX but not the Bird Bookshop.

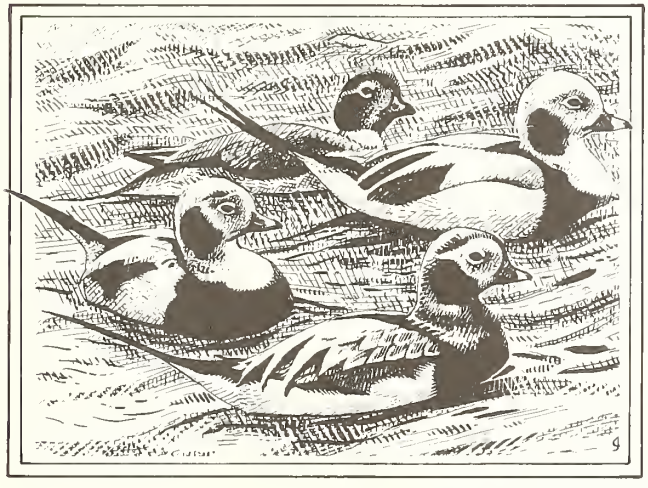
SdP

Photo Spot

Don Smith took these unusual shots of an Oystercatcher sitting on its nest in the right hand branch of a dead tree on the side of a country road in Ayrshire in May 1986. The road carries quite a lot of traffic as well as many walkers at week-ends. While the bird was incubating the road was resurfaced! Despite all these distractions the young hatched and left the nest successfully. Oystercatchers are quite well known for nesting off the ground in tree stumps and on rooftops but they are by no means the only species to occasionally choose unusual sites. If you have photographs – black and white, please – of unusual nests please let the Editors see them.

Birds of ISLAY

Richard E. Elliott



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SOC Notices

New Secretary

We are delighted to announce that Maureen Williams (perhaps better known to some as Maureen Doran as she was Bookshop Manager/Assistant Secretary from 1982-84 before leaving to have son Daniel) started work as Club Secretary this January. Maureen has already started visiting Branches, and will be at the Spring Conference, though obviously her first priority has to be administrative matters at Regent Terrace.

Lothian members save the day

Usually *SBN* is packed into envelopes, with various enclosures, by a local hospital. This December it became obvious they had too much to cope with in the pre-Xmas period so Pat Webster and Peter Gordon organised local members Ian Balfour Paul, Ruaraidh Hamilton, the Hurley family, Graeme Prest, Ruby Smillie, Myra Sutter, Sheila Stuart and Stewart Ward to ensure you received *SBN 12* before Xmas. A big thank you to all.

Woodpeckers in the Lothians

In 1989 a study is planned on the breeding ecology of Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers in the Lothians.

If you know of any nest sites or areas where birds have been seen during the breeding season and would like to help, please contact **Alan Hilton, 3 West Craigie Cottages, South Queensferry EH30 9TR, 031-319 1631** *or* **Ian Langford, The Haven, Seton East, Longniddry EH32 0PG, Tel: Prestonpans 811094.**

200 Club

Council has approved a proposal by Daphne Peirse-Duncombe to start a '200 Club', the aim of which is to raise money for the decoration and refurbishment of the Club's premises. Many items, such as curtains and floor coverings, were acquired at the time the Scottish Centre was opened in 1958 and now need to be renewed; in addition some internal redecoration is needed. A '200 Club' is a Private Lottery under the Lotteries and Amusements Act, 1976, and so only SOC members may participate.

She hopes to enlist at least 200 members who would each subscribe £1 per month, either by an annual cheque or standing order. Just over 50% of the income will be given out in prizes each year, with the balance going to the SOC. Once 200 members have joined, prizes of £50, £10 and £5 will be paid out each month, with an additional prize of £250 paid in June and December; until then monthly prizes will depend on the number of subscribers.

It is hoped to make the first monthly draw on 1 June, with subsequent draws on the first of each month thereafter; the first half yearly draw will be on 1 December 1989. SOC members wishing to join should either send a cheque (for £12 and payable to 'SOC 200 Club'), or write and ask for a banker's order form, to Mrs. D. Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. Council has warmly endorsed this initiative by Daphne, and I urge members to support this new venture.

Stan da Prato

Scottish Conservation Projects

If you want details of low cost working holidays throughout Scotland write to SCP at **Balallan House, 24 Allan Park, Stirling FK8 2QG.**

Atlas of Breeding Birds of Greece

All ornithologists who can contribute breeding data for Greece are requested to take an active part in the production of the European Ornithological Atlas. The data are collected on behalf of S.M. Taylor, Chairman of the European Ornithological Atlas Committee. Please send your data entered directly onto distribution maps after each breeding season to: **Hartmut Heckenroth, Hoppegartenring 90, D-3012 Langenhagen 1, West Germany.**

Volunteers Needed at Eilat

Here is a unique opportunity to do some birding in one of the hot spots of the Wester Palearctic. You will gain experience and knowledge, and we will gain a pair of helping hands to assist us. Volunteers are needed for the following period: September-November: Passerine ringing, Waterfowl survey. February-May: Passerine ringing, Waterfowl survey, Raptor migration survey, Wardening, General Migration Survey.

Applicants should have experience in one of these fields and are requested to send details and recommendations from birders/organisations they have worked for. Ringers should send a copy of their license. Volunteers work six days a week. Five days will be assigned to research and the remaining day to guiding or other duties. Lodging in a furnished flat is provided and volunteers staying for one month or more receive 100$ a month for food and expenses. Transport to Eilat and back is at your expense. You should have your own binoculars and telescope. Clothes for a wide range of temperatures, swimming costume and a hat are indispensable. Blankets are provided but we recommend a lightweight sleeping bag. Direct flights to Eilat run from most European countries. Please apply as soon as possible as we have limited places. **David Yekutiel, Merav Gellart, IBCE, POB 774, Eilat, Israel.**

Calling all readers!

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Small ads

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Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Mike Ashley

What is at stake in the Cairngorms

As the pressure to develop remote parts of the Highlands grows so their bird communities come under threat. Increased afforestation has led to habitat loss in recent years, particularly of moorland areas and increased numbers of tourists have led to increased disturbance. The development of the skiing industry in Scotland has been responsible for the opening up of large areas of land at high altitudes, not just to skiers but to others who use the chairlifts both in summer and winter. This had led to a significant rise in the number of people visiting the high tops in areas such as the Cairngorms, Caenlochan and Drumochter. This in turn has caused increasing disturbance to nesting birds.

Special protection

For all three areas mentioned above the ornithological interest is considerable and indeed all are identified by the Nature Conservancy Council as SSSIs and as proposed Special Protection Areas under the EEC Conservation of Wild Birds Directive. (EEC Directive 79/409). The designation as SPA is reserved for the most important bird sites within the EEC which hold substantial proportions of the populations of threatened species, or are sites which may be used by large numbers of birds during periods of migration. Other SPAs in Scotland include the island of Rhum and Duich Moss on Islay. On areas identified as proposed SPAs there is a presumption against any development within their boundaries which would lead to a deterioration in the habitats available to the birds. It is more than surprising therefore that plans to develop the Lurchers Gully area of the Northern Corries SSSI in the Cairngorms for skiing have been resurrected. Plans to develop the area have already been turned down by the Secretary of State for Scotland after a public enquiry in 1981. The present proposed development, which is remarkably similar to that suggested in 1981, would lead to habitat destruction and an increase in the levels of disturbance to the breeding species present, both in the immediate area and over the Cairngorm plateau as a whole.

Why the fuss?

Why all the fuss from the conservation lobby about this particular development? The arguments against the proposed development revolve around the international importance of the Cairngorms for nature conservation as well as for scenic considerations. The site holds a great variety of habitats at a range of altitudes including pinewood, grassland, moorland, cliffs, corries and mountain plateaux areas. Indeed it is this continuation and complex of habitat types found within the one site which makes the Cairngorms the most important mountain area in Britain and the EEC for conservation. This continuation of habitats is particularly well represented within the Northern Corries SSSI where habitats ranging from pinewood through to Arctic plateaux exist within a very limited distance. The area holds a unique assemblage of nesting bird species. These species tend to use overlapping parts of the Cairngorms as feeding and nesting areas. Some species do however show preferences for particular habitat types within the site.

Golden Eagles *Mike Ashley*

Ornithological importance

The Cairngorms hold important populations of Capercaillie, Scottish Crossbills, and Crested Tit. These species use the extensive area of pinewood at lower altitudes in the Cairngorms. The Scottish Crossbill is of course the only indigenous species we have.

As altitude increases the mature pinewoods give way to areas of regenerating pine, indeed the Cairngorms hold some of the best examples of this habitat in Britain and the EEC. The open moorland areas within the site support populations of Golden Plover, Golden Eagle, Merlin and Hen Harrier as well as populations of several passerines. Raptors use these open habitats as feeding ranges which of necessity cover very large areas. For example Eagles and Merlins in the Cairngorms may hunt from the lower moorland areas up onto the mountain plateau itself. Effective protection of raptor populations in the Cairngorms means that the whole site should be protected. Developments affecting any one part of the site are likely to have long term effects on the overall bird interest also.

Fragile environments

The Cairngorms proposed SPA is perhaps best known for its mountain plateau habitat and its associated bird assemblage. This habitat is characterised by the fragility of its component parts. Any damage done to the vegetation at these altitudes takes an extremely long time to repair. Similarly, some of the birds found nesting there are very susceptible to disturbance from hill walkers and others. The problem of an increasing number of human visitors to the plateau leading to an increasing number of human visitors to the plateau leading to an increasing number of scavenging birds feeding on their rubbish is now well known. This is likely to lead to increased rates of nest predation by crows in particular on the nesting Arctic species.

The Dotterel is perhaps one of the best known species of the Arctic bird community in Scotland. The birds arrive back on their nesting areas in the Cairngorms in spring each year, gathering in large groups for pre-nesting display and courtship. They eventually lay eggs in May through to July with the male doing all the incubation for the 24-26 day period until the eggs hatch. Once the young are out of the nest they may be moved considerable distances by the adult birds within the breeding area to obtain food and shelter. It is necessary to effectively protect large areas of the plateau from high levels of human disturbance at this stage in the lifecycle if chick survival is to be ensured. After nesting and chick rearing the birds gather again on specific areas to feed up

before migration to North Africa for the winter. Dotterel feed on tipulids and beetles through the nesting season. These invertebrates are themselves dependent on the montane fell-field vegetation for their survival.

The overall importance of the Cairngorms is enhanced by the fact that it appears to play a vital role in the ecology of several species, not just at a local level but also at a national one. Recent results of ringing work undertaken by a research team from the NCC (See Des Thompson's article in *SBN* 6 Dec 1986) have shown that the area is a major gathering ground for a large part of the national Dotterel population during spring and autumn passage. Changes to important areas within the Cairngorms or increased disturbance may therefore adversely affect Dotterels which would normally go on to nest on other hills.

More ski facilities?

It is apparent that the Cairngorms is one of the prime areas for conservation in Scotland and a unique area for Arctic birds in the EEC. The threat to the Lurchers Gully section of the Northern Corries SSSI should be removed. Skiing could, if really necessary, be developed in other areas where the damage to the conservation interest would be much less. Indeed it might be that the continued lack of early winter snowfall in Scotland will make the skiing industry of even more marginal profitability anyway! Is this really the most appropriate time for a dramatic increase in the skiing capacity of the Cairngorms to be contemplated?

World Site

With these threats from development one must ask why the area is not yet designated as an SPA or even a World Heritage Site. The bird interest of the site clearly makes it qualify as SPA. We believe that preliminary work towards designation has been undertaken by the NCC. What then is the hold up in the process? Even without formal designation as an SPA the site is still offered protection through the SSSI status of its component parts. Proposed SPAs are supposed to be treated with the same respect by planning authorities as those already designated. It is obvious that Highland Regional Council should not even be considering the development plan if they were obeying their own rules!

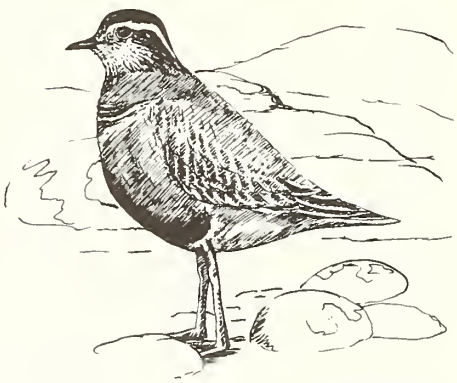
Further development of the important mid-altitude area in the Cairngorms, particularly within the Northern Corries SSSI, should not be allowed. Development would lead to a devaluation of the overall conservation interest of the site by direct habitat loss and by allowing much easier access to the plateaux areas and their important bird community. This would lead to a decrease in the attractiveness of the area to several important bird species. This is not to say that people and conservation cannot both be accommodated in the Cairngorms. What is needed however is a sensible management plan that will allow people to enjoy the area without destroying it at the same time. In almost any other country in Europe an area of this quality would already be a National Park with a comprehensive management plant designed to prevent piecemeal development.

What can be done?

What can we do to help stop the present development going ahead? Firstly everyone worried abut the future of the birdlife of the Cairngorms should write to their MP and to Highland Regional Council to express their concern over the development plans. You could also contact Save the Cairngorms Campaign, if you haven't already done so, to give them your support. The Cairngorms are just too important for us to sit back and do nothing.

Stan da Prato
President

The SOC has already written to Highland Regional Council expressing its grave concern over the Lurchers Gully proposals but individual letters are still of value especially if enough people put pen to paper. The address is Glenurquhart Road, Inverness. The address of the Save the Cairngorms Campaign is PO Box 39, Inverness IV1 2RL.



Dotterel *Mike Ashley*

Dotterel bonus for Atlas fieldworkers

From April to July last year we took part in Atlas survey work in the eastern Cairngorms. While visiting the area we discovered a male Dotterel with its mate preparing to lay. This was no ordinary pair as the male was tagged on the left leg with a metal ring. We knew birds ringed on the left leg are often Norwegian ringed birds as ringers on the continent use a different grip to British ringers.

We contacted Stuart Rae, who is working on Dotterel in the area, and shortly afterwards he was able to relocate the bird close to where we had seen it. He succeeded in reading the ring. This bird had indeed been ringed in Norway as a breeding adult in 1980 by a group of Scottish ringers, including Stuart's brother Robert Rae, who were part of an SOC sponsored expedition. This is the first record of a Norwegian ringed Dotterel subsequently found breeding in Scotland. As this individual was a breeding adult when ringed it proves that interchange of breeding adults occurs between Norway and Scotland.

Whilst Atlas work will become valuable in it's own right, no matter where you are atlassing there's always the chance of turning up other unexpected and valuable information.

John and Margaret Swallow

Fieldworkers are reminded of the need to consult the appropriate authorities if they anticipate dealing with Schedule 1 species; this was done in this case.

Birds in Ireland

Clive D. Hutchinson

The author, a leading Irish ornithologist, has compiled this comprehensive review of birds in the Republic and Northern Ireland to coincide with the 21st anniversary year of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy's foundation.

The book is timely for other reasons, too. Knowledge about the status and distribution of birds in Ireland has increased greatly since the 1960s and this is reflected in the detailed species accounts which form the major part of the book. Factors which led to this greater knowledge, recent changes in bird distribution and status, and reasons for the absence of some species are topics discussed in the book's introductory chapters. Other subjects covered are Ireland's topography, climate and habitats.
The text is accompanied by more than 100 of John Busby's superb illustrations.

Publication May
26.5x19cm, 212 pages,
£19.00 net

Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland

by J. N. Dymond.
P. A. Fraser
and S. J. M. Gantlett

This book by a trio of rare-bird specialists is a successor to two earlier works (long out of print), *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1974) and *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1976). It unifies both of the earlier books and updates them, adding more than 80 species to the previous total.

Publication July 1989
24 x 16cm, 480 pages,
£19.00 net

T & A D POYSER

Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

Late winter remained mild until early February when a short cold spell brought snow to several areas. There were a number of very strong westerly gales which brought a few American ducks across the Atlantic, but rarities were few and far between. March was mild and a spell of south-easterly winds resulted in several early records of spring migrants.

The Whalsay **White-billed Diver**, now in its tenth winter in Shetland, was seldom seen due to rough weather, but another was noted in Scapa Flow. A scatter of **Red-necked Grebes** included a good count of 39 in Gosford Bay on 24 Feb. while a **Black-necked Grebe** was at Musselburgh in early Jan. A **Manx Shearwater** off Stevenston on 14 Jan. was unusual and a **Bittern** at Strathbeg in late Feb. was no doubt glad of the mild weather. At least 6 drake **American Wigeon** included 2 at Melby, Shetland and singles at Loch of Harray, Orkney, Loch Fleet, Inverness and Hunterston. A **Garganey** at Birsay was exceptionally early on 25 March. The only **Green-winged Teal** was in Ayrshire in Jan. Diving ducks included a drake **Red-crested Pochard** at Kilconquhar, a female **Ring-necked Duck** near Sandness, Shetland, with a drake at Linlithgow, **King Eiders** in Shetland, off Fair Isle, and at Tayport, an **American Black Scoter** off Nairn Bar, up to 4 **Surf Scoters** in Largo Bay and another 4 in Gosford Bay. **Smew** were scarce. A hybrid **Smew** × **Goldeneye** returned to Inverness. **Ruddy Ducks** were at Dinnet and Kilconquhar.

Unusual raptors included **Goshawks** on Hoy and North Ronaldsay in Feb, **Rough-legged Buzzards** in Shetland, Orkney, at Forvie and in the Lammermuirs and white **Gyr Falcons** on Coll and Eriskay. Extremely unusual was a calling **Spotted Crake** at Lindores at the end of Feb. A count of 12 **Jack Snipe** at Tailend Moss on 26 March was good for the time of year. On Unst, a **Long-billed Dowitcher** and a **Whimbrel** wintered.

A **Pomarine Skua** was off Chanonry Point on 31 Jan. but even more unusual was an **Arctic Skua** off Stevenston on 14 Jan. **Great Skuas** were seen from 5 Feb. An adult **Mediterranean Gull** returned to Aberdeen and **Little Gulls** were reported in Shetland, Orkney and at Brora. A **Ring-billed Gull** put in a brief appearance in Shetland, but 2 at Stromness were long-stayers, one was also seen at Doonfoot and another at Ayr. **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** included the **Scandinavian** race at Dalmeny and Aberlady. **White Gulls** were scarce. One of the most exciting birds of the period was the adult **Ivory Gull** at Wick on 27 March. Two **Sandwich Terns** wintered off Stronsay. **Little Auks** were rather scarce. In the Beauly Firth, up to 4,000 **Guillemots** gathered to feed on sprats.

The only report of a **Shore Lark** was a single at Fife Ness, reflecting the increasing scarcity of this species. In late March a large movement of **Sand Martins** occurred in Aberdeenshire. The only report of a **Water Pipit** was at Aberlady. Small numbers of **Waxwings** continued to be seen in many places. A **Black-bellied Dipper** wintered in Shetland. There was a scatter of **Black Redstarts**. Two **Stonechats** visited Fair Isle in March and there was a count of 5 at Fife Ness on 26 Feb. The earliest **Wheatears** reported were at St. Abbs and Ayr on 23 March, but they had reached the Western Isles by 29th. **Blackcaps** and **Chiffchaffs** wintered at a number of locations, including 3 of the latter in Lerwick, but numbers were unexceptional. Migrant **Chiffchaffs** occurred in many areas at the end of March; more unusual was an early **Willow Warbler** at Ayr on 27 March. Amongst a widespread fall of **Goldcrests** on 27 March a single **Firecrest** appeared at Girdleness.

Great Grey Shrikes were scarce. **Crossbill** numbers were high in several areas. **Scottish Crossbills** in the Spey Valley were reportedly very low in numbers. Two **Northern Bullfinches** were in Shetland in Feb. with another in Orkney in March. **Lapland Bunting** were also reported in very small numbers, except a flock of 22 which wintered at Eyemouth. The largest flock of **Snow Buntings** reported was 200 at Musselburgh.

STOP PRESS

The flock of ***Surf Scoters*** *at Gosford Bay, Lothian reached 10 with another at Musselburgh and Fair Isle produced its third* ***Song Sparrow*** *on 11 April.*

Pete Ellis

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

Photo Spot

Kumlien's Gull (L.g. kumlieni) is the Canadian race of the Iceland gull and breeds on Baffin Island. Normally they winter on Atlantic coasts from Labrador to New England. Kumlien's differs from the Iceland Gull by having a slightly larger bill, and in the adult by the grey pattern on the tips of the outer primaries of its wings. An adult Kumlien's Gull, presumably the same bird, has wintered at Banff Harbour each year since it was first seen in March 1985. It tends to stay just offshore and often feeds with other gulls at a sewage outlet. As a result it is normally out of range of most camera lenses, but not when this photograph was taken on 4 February 1989. This gull is a very rare visitor to Scotland and the islands. There are only two previous reports: one from Shetland (February 1983) and another from Orkney (January/May 1983).

Sam Alexander

Viking

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The 1988/89 Dunlin Invasion

As reported in the Recent Reports section of *SBN 12* unusually large numbers of Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints and Ruffs turned up during the autumn in north and east Scotland. What was not recorded was the large numbers of Dunlin that appeared with them. The Highland Ringing Group have been cannon netting waders in the Moray Basin since 1977 and have gathered a great deal of information on Dunlin. In addition co-ordinated counts have been conducted in the area since January 1985 (see *SBN 3*). By using information from both sources, counts and ringing data, it is possible to try and explain what happened in winter 1988/89.

The birds started arriving in unusually high numbers in September throughout the Moray Basin. Cannon-net catches were made at Findhorn, Inverness and Portgordon in September and these showed that the flocks were entirely composed of young birds. The presence of birds with Norwegian rings, indicate that these were of the *alpina* race which breeds in Northern Scandinavia and Siberia and this was confirmed by biometric measurements of captured birds. A co-ordinated count on 16 October 1988 revealed a record 12,122 Dunlin in the Basin, far higher than previous October counts which have varied from 497-4778 birds. A flock of 400 were present in the Inverness area in October and 107 were caught on 5 November. All bar one were juveniles. In late November two catches were made in the Cromarty Firth. These revealed the presence of slightly more adults, but juveniles still predominated, comprising 86% of the 192 caught.

The co-ordinated count on 11 December revealed only 8441 birds in the Basin. We suspected that many of the young birds may have moved on as we have ringing evidence from previous years to show that this does happen. The count on 8 January, however, revealed a record total of 15375 Dunlin, almost double the previous mid-winter record (previous mid-winter peaks have varied from 4970-8646 birds). This increase was probably due to the belated arrival of adults from their continental moulting grounds. This is backed up by a catch of 675 birds at Chanonry, near Fortrose, on 22 January which included 37% adults. Adults usually arrive in the basin in late October/November but often do not reach peak numbers till January. The later than usual arrival may have been due to the exceptionally mild conditions on the continent, which had probably allowed the birds to remain on their moulting grounds for longer than usual. 14,094 birds were still present in the basin during the co-ordinated count on 19 February, but thereafter numbers started to decline.

Catches from previous years at Chanonry show that adults usually average 58% of the wintering population, much higher than the 37% noted in January 1989. The vast numbers present in the basin in 1988/89 were therefore probably mainly due to a very good breeding season in Siberia resulting in exceptionally high numbers of young birds.

Another interesting feature was that the young birds turned up in large numbers at many sites that do not normally hold many Dunlin. Many of these sites were abandoned in mid-winter, whilst numbers increased at more traditional sites. For instance, at Chanonry, only 26 birds were present in December, but 1200 were located there by January. Retraps of young birds ringed earlier in the winter showed that many of them had been using these alternative sites eg. 1 had come from Portgordon, 3 from Findhorn and 4 from Inverness (all ringed in September) and 16 from Alturlie, near Inverness ringed in early November.

Bob Swann

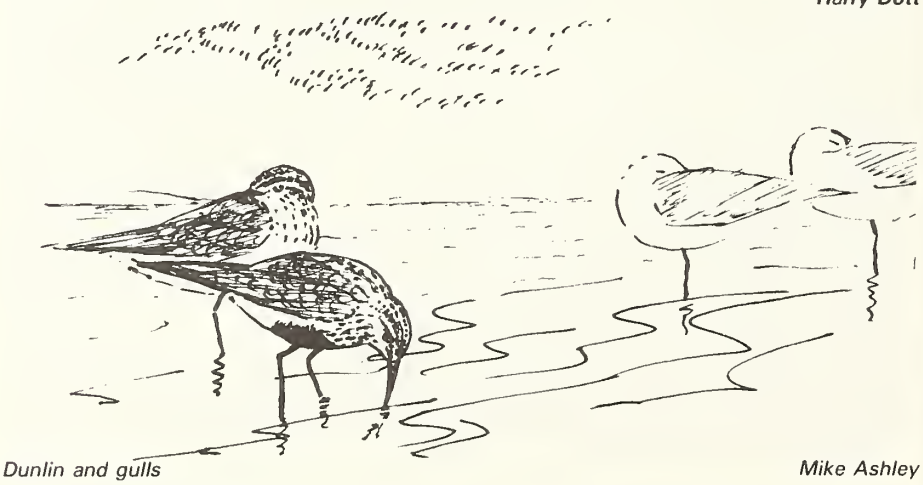
An unusual Fulmar nest

In the summer of 1988 I discovered the nest of a Fulmar on the shore next to the high water mark near Cursiter, two miles east of Finstown, on Mainland Orkney. The nest of dried seaweed was under a protective piece of rock. The highest tidal mark on the shore was almost at the nest. The intertidal part of the shore was of mud, gravel and stones, and only very slightly sloping. Above the protective stone was an earth bank of *c.* ½ metre and a grass verge next to a main road about five metres back from the nest.

I did not manage to return to see how the parent Fulmars managed to land or take off from this nest. They were obviously succeeding in rearing their chick; on 27 July the healthy-looking chick would be round about four weeks old.

Fulmars are known to nest on flat surfaces without immediate aerial take-off, especially on isolated islands, often at the base of field walls, less frequently in sand dunes and sometimes on the tops of walls or on ruined buildings.

Harry Dott



Dunlin and gulls *Mike Ashley*

A patch for all seasons

Words of wisdom from some of our early mentors in bird watching will stay with us till our dying day. A favourite with us is Michael Clegg's "Never be parted from your food" when we are wondering whether to take our packed lunch with us or leave it in the car. Another is that of John Mather, recorder for Yorkshire, who used to say "Get your own patch and flog it.".

We like to consider Gen Quaich at Amulree our own patch and, whilst not quite flogging it in the way meant by John Mather, we have paid it regular visits over the past ten years and have always found it rewarding.

We were there one autumn day when thousands of Fieldfares poured through from Strath Braan. Another day, in late spring, we recorded six of the thrush family. This year was noteworthy for our numbers of Short-eared Owls and Blackcock also were well represented. On one occasion we walked a short way up the slope from the west end of Loch Freuchie and disturbed a Golden Eagle which was so close that all we could see in our binoculars was a giant head.

Perhaps our most memorable occasion was when, in the company of a member of the American Audubon Society, we had good views of a Golden Eagle being mobbed by a Buzzard, and later on a spectacular diving and calling display by a pair of Peregrines right over our heads. This was in autumn and was very unusual to us as it seemed more like a spring mating display, but it is something that can happen at that time of year. Our American visitor was enthralled as, indeed, were we.

Hen Harriers are not uncommon and we had a good view of a Goshawk on one occasion. We also have happy memories of flocks of Brambling round the farms. To complement this there are the wildfowl on Loch Freuchie which can be viewed either from the road on the south side or the path on the north side.

On one of our Winter Atlas visits there we recorded, *inter alia* ten Buzzards and one Starling, and we often wonder whether the B.T.O. thought we had got them the wrong way round! These are some of the highlights.

In ten years we have recorded over 80 species. We should add that we include in the "Glen Quaich" area the side valley leading from Croftmill up to Lochan A'Mhuilinn, which is particularly rewarding in spring for breeding wildfowl and a colony of Black-headed Gulls.

Access

Cars can be parked at the Amulree Hotel. There is a right of way on the north side of the glen which continues as far as Tirchardie and then goes on to the road on the south side. The track from Tirchardie to Garrow Bridge on the north side is not a right of way but walkers seem to be tolerated. If you do not object to much road walking you can walk right round Loch Freuchie back to your car at Amulree. With the use of two cars you can walk the whole length of the glen from Amulree to Garrow or vice-versa. There is space for two or three cars just before the Garrow bridge at the west end.

Stan & Marion Shimeld

Merlin attacking Jackdaw

Mike Ashley

At 0730 on 20 February 1988 near Laggan Point, Islay a loud squawking by Jackdaws drew my attention to a small, squirming bundle on a grass field close to a farmhouse where Jackdaws sat about onthe chimneys each morning. The bundle was a female Merlin with both feet hooked into a Jackdaw on the sides of its lower neck. In the struggle both became tired; the Merlin was hanging on the front of the Jackdaw with its chest on the ground, and the Jackdaw in an upright position struggling. All the time other Jackdaws were diving and calling close around the pair. With an added effort the Merlin tried to fly, dragged the Jackdaw about five metres along the ground and stopped again. A group of Hooded Crows then landed, striding round just a few feet away. The Merlin and Jackdaw suddenly released from each other, both flew off, and there was sudden quietness.

Harry Dott

Working for the SOC

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GRAFTON BOOKS

Raptor Round Up, 1988

This report summarises the activities of five of the six Raptor Study groups currently active in Scotland. This year we include data from the newly formed Uist group for Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Merlin. A total of 140 Eagle home ranges (116 occupied) and 345 Peregrine sites (at least 291 occupied) were checked as were over 185 Merlin sites (a minimum of 179 occupied). This is the eighth report from North-East, the fifth from Central, South-West and South-East, the third from Orkney and Shetland and the first from the Uists. The information contained in this report was gathered by a number of extremely dedicated workers, most of whom are voluntary and work solely in their spare time. This report would not be possible without their help and is presented on their behalf. The group co-ordinator for each species is included in brackets after each area heading.

Many workers commented on the very good weather we enjoyed in the spring which allowed the birds to rear good numbers of young. Most species were well on by July so were unaffected by the summer monsoon. However, it was only a good season for those birds which were left alone. Nest robberies and persecution continued at an unacceptably high level. Many game keepers are still living in the Victorian era as far as birds of prey are concerned.

GOLDEN EAGLE

North-East Scotland RSG (Robert Rae)

Thirty six home ranges were checked, 31 were occupied by pairs and 2 by singles. 22 (perhaps 23) pairs laid eggs, 16 of which hatched. 15 pairs were successful producing a minimum of 20 young but probably at least 23. There were encouraging signs in this area with at least 4 pairs setting up territories in new areas (1 of which bred successfully). On the down side there was the well publicised incident of a male found poisoned on its nest in the Caenlochan National Nature Reserve.

Central Scotland RSG (Dave Dick, Roger Broad)

Twenty three home ranges were checked of which 20 were occupied. 14 pairs laid eggs. Nine pairs hatched eggs and successfully fledged a total of 10 young. At least 3 pairs are thought to have failed as a result of egg collecting/persecution. Four known English egg collectors were apprehended at one site in late March and subsequently received large fines.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad)

As with Peregrine featuring in this report for the first time. 27 home ranges were monitored on a mainland study area. At 14 sites eggs were laid, 9 pairs were successful rearing 12 young. Information was also available for a further 40 home ranges which held 31-35 pairs. Eggs were laid at a minimum of 20 sites with 16 pairs rearing over 20 young. Breeding success was judged to be good with 0.65-0.71 young per breeding pair and 1.28 young per successful pair. Two immature eagles found poisoned in May on north Islay received widespread publicity.

Uists RSG (Tim Dix)

Birds were present on all 14 home ranges checked. Of the 11 pairs known to have built up nests only 7 laid eggs. At 4 of these eggs hatched producing 5 chicks but one died at the age of about 4 weeks. 3 pairs are thought to have failed as a result of persecution but the true figure could be as high as 5. Prey items included a Polecat-ferret and a recently fledged Song Thrush.

Golden Eagle *Mike Ashley*

PEREGRINE

North-East Scotland RSG (Jon Hardey)

One hundred sites were monitored of which 89 were occupied by at least a single bird. 65 pairs laid eggs, 47 of which hatched. 42 sites got to the large young stage and 35 fledged young. A total of at least 83 young fledged successfully. Interesting prey items this year included Pygmy Shrew, Manx Shearwater, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Long-tailed Skua (at an inland site).

South-East Scotland RSG (George Carse)

Thirty two sites were checked of which 26 were occupied by pairs (a further site held only a sub-adult). 24 laid clutches of which 17 hatched. 5 nests were robbed (2 of them twice, having relaid) and a further 5 failed due to human interference. 12 broods were successfully reared producing a total of 35 young. Only 1 coastal site was successful from which 3 young flew.

South-West Scotland RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

A total of 56 sites were checked of which 51 were occupied (46 by pairs). 41 of these pairs laid eggs but only 24 hatched. All these were successful producing 53 fledged young. 11 nests were robbed by egg collectors or falconers and a further 3 failed as a result of persecution; 7 failed naturally. It is interesting to note the 10 sites not occupied by pairs; this may be connected to the practice being carried out by at least 2 groups in the area of trapping adult birds off the breeding sites during the winter and early spring by using live decoys. Early checks may prove useful for such sites.

Central Scotland RSG (Patrick Stirling-Aird)

Eighty one sites were checked of which 67 were occupied, 60 by pairs. 36 pairs were successful rearing a total of at least 66 young – a poor showing compared to 1987 (98 young from 42 nests). Several instances were noted of eggs failing to hatch – this may have been due to cold weather in April. There were a number of unoccupied territories in one area in the west which may be linked with poor food supply. Prey items recorded include Snipe and Black-headed Gull.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad)

Raptor workers checked 35 pairs in this area which has never before received such coverage and is consequently included in this report for the first time. 23 pairs were proved to breed but full details are only available for 17 of these. 6 failed but the remaining 11 pairs reared at least 22 young. Overall breeding success was 1.29 young per clutch and 2.0 young per successful pair.

Orkney (Erick Meek)

Twenty five sites were monitored, 19 of which were occupied. Eggs were laid at 11 sites, 7 of which are thought to have failed. The remaining 4 pairs reared a minimum of 6 young. As with previous years the Mainland sites did badly producing only one young.

Shetland
(Pete Ellis)

Five sites were checked all of which were occupied, 4 by pairs. Only 2 laid eggs but they were both successful rearing 2 young each. Both site occupation and breeding success remain low in these populations in the Northern Isles the reasons for which are still unclear.

Uists RSG
(Tim Dix)

There are considerable problems involved in monitoring Peregrines in this area. Many of their nesting sites are remote and impossible to see into when they are located. At least 8 sites are known where birds have bred but there could be as many as 12-14 pairs. Prey items recorded included Rock Dove, Common Gull and Black-headed Gull.

MERLIN

North-East and Central RSGs

This is a combined summary as there was overlap of coverage in Tayside.

Grampian
(Graham Rebecca)

Breeding was proved on 42 territories and 30 of these were successful (ie at least 1 fledged). 106 young were ringed, at least 100 of which fledged. Breeding was proved for the first time in 9 territories.

Perthshire
(Graham Rebecca)

Twenty successful pairs were monitored from 28 territories in which eggs were laid. 56 young were ringed, a minimum of 55 of which are known to have fledged. 13 new breeding sites were located.

Angus
(Ron Downing)

Fifteen pairs were located, 9 were proved to breed (2 territories were not checked after initial location). 1 pair failed at egg stage the remaining 8 pairs raised 19 young (2.1 young per clutch laid). 24 chicks were ringed.

Further details are available from the area as a whole. 21 pairs definitely failed (12 in Grampian, 9 in Tayside), the majority of which (17) were at egg stage and seemed to be mostly caused by the birds breaking their own eggs (12 eggs have been sent for pesticide analysis). However, the cause of failure at 1 site is known to be a Hen Harrier which broke the clutch and may have taken the female. 3 failed at the young stage (2 of which disappeared, the 3rd may have been taken by a fox). A sample of 21 sites monitored in west Perthshire reared an average of 2.4 young per site.

South-East Scotland RSG
(Alan Heavisides)

At least 42 sites were checked, a total of 37 were occupied. A minimum of 12 sites raised at least 36 young. One area which received the best coverage produced 19 occupied sites out of 24 checked. However, only 19 young fledged from 12 nests. Five sites failed completely at egg stage, whilst 3 produced only one young each. Eggs have been sent for pesticide analysis.

PEREGRINE

	NE	C	SW	SE	Argyll	Ork	Shet	Uist	Total
Home ranges/sites checked	100	81	56	32	35	25	5	11	345
Home ranges/sites with birds present	89	67	51	27	–	19	5	10	291+
Home ranges/sites in which eggs laid	65	–	41	24	23	11	2	–	202+
Home ranges/sites in which eggs hatched	47	–	24	17	–	–	2	–	141+
Home ranges/sites in which chicks fledged	39	36	24	12	11	4	2	–	128+
Total young fledged	83+	66+	53	35	22	6+	4	–	269+

GOLDEN EAGLE

	NE	C	Argyll	Uist	Total
Home ranges/sites checked	36	23	67	14	140
Home ranges/sites with birds present	33	20	–	14	112+
Home ranges/sites in which eggs laid	22	14	45-49	7	88-92
Home ranges/sites in which eggs hatched	16	9	–	5	55+
Home ranges/sites in which chicks fledged	15	9	25	4	53
Total young fledged (probably fledged)	20(23)	10	32+	4	66+

MERLIN

	NE&C	SW	SE	Ork	Shet	Uist	Total
Sites checked	–	17	52+	–	–	7	185+
Sites with birds present	–	16	37	10	30	7	179+
Sites in which eggs laid	79	12	–	7	26	3	148+
Sites in which eggs hatched	62	8	–	6	–	3	117+
Sites in which chicks fledged	58	8	12+	5	18	2	111+
Total young fledged	174+	31+	36+	13+	58	8	339+

South-West Scotland RSG
(Dick Roxburgh)

Seventeen sites were monitored, 16 being occupied. 12 pairs laid eggs, 4 of these failed – all on keepered ground. 8 pairs reared a minimum of 31 young (2.6 young per clutch laid).

Argyll
(Roger Broad)

Breeding was proved at 7 sites, 1 failed on eggs and one may have produced flying young. The remaining 5 sites were known to have been successful raising at least 14 chicks (2.0 young per clutch laid).

Orkney
(Eric Meek)

Considered to be a good year. 10 sites were occupied by birds, 7 definitely laid. One pair broke their own eggs and 1 pair lost their brood to a mammalian predator. The other 5 fledged at lest 13 young (1.9 young per clutch).

Shetland
(Pete Ellis)

An increased effort was put in on Merlins in Shetland in 1988 with a subsequent increase in the number of pairs located. 30 sites were found to be occupied, 27 by pairs. 26 pairs laid eggs and 18 were successful rearing 58 young (2.2 young per clutch). 44 species were recorded as prey items.

Uists
(Tim Dix)

Seven territories are known, 3 laid eggs. One of these failed at chick stage, the other 2 produced 4 young each. The true population of Merlins in the Uists could be in the order of at least 12-14 pairs.

KESTREL

South-West Scotland RSG
(Gordon Riddle)

Gordon reports that 1988 was the best season since his study began in 1972 perhaps due to the very good spring. Some pairs began breeding early but the remainder were delayed by 2 weeks of cold and wet weather in early April. 80% of the 51 territories checked were occupied and clutch sizes at an average of 5.4 were the highest recorded. 11 clutches of 6 were noted amongst the 26 clutches examined. Hatching rate was very high at 94% and there were only 6 failures, 3 due to man. One was due to predation by a Long-eared Owl. Brood survival was about 85% and in all 120 young fledged from 34 nesting attempts giving an average of 3.5 young per clutch hatched or 4.3 young per successful pair. 93 young were ringed from 21 broods. One unusual incident was of a pair on a clutch of 4 being ousted by a pair of Barn Owls which laid 5 eggs in the scrape and proceeded to incubate all 9 eggs – only the owlets hatched. The Kestrels moved to a nearby site and fledged 5 young.

Stuart Benn, RSPB

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Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 July for the Sept. number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries - and suggestions - will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in *SB 14(1)*.

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family	£360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family	£10.00

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Spring Conference at Crieff

The pleasant wooded glades of the Crieff Hydro provided the setting for this year's joint SOC/BTO one-day Scottish Birdwatchers' conference which attracted *c.* 100 people.

The morning series of talks was on the theme of atlassing, with David Gibbons, the National Organiser, discussing the New Atlas of Breeding Birds. For this atlas, an attempt is being made to make amateur atlasers provide the statisticians with data on abundance, a facet more usually tackled by CBCs and single species surveys. The horrendous forms produced for the first year's work have been drastically altered, in a bid to make the atlassing work more compatible with birdwatchers, if not computers!

Pilot work on abundance has been done with species such as Redstarts in Devon, and while this works well in practice, the problem of scarce or secretive species such as Water Rail and Ptarmigan, which need more than a two hour visit to locate, seems to have received less attention. The data from the Seabird Colony Register, collected using different methodologies, has yet to be incorporated into the New Atlas and I still wonder just how useful the final product will be.

Jim Reid talked on the work done to date on the New Atlas in Scotland. Coverage was around 40% in the first year and it is hoped the more remote areas can be filled in over the next two seasons. Jim chose Crested Tit, Buzzard and Mute Swan to illustrate his points, and appealed for more effort in future – we don't really want to have to invite bus loads of fieldworkers from SE England to finish the work.

Kingfisher *Dave Mitchell*

Running concurrently with the New Atlas are some Local Atlases and Iain Gibson spoke on the Clyde Tetrad Atlas, now in its fourth year, and organised by members of the Clyde Branch of the SOC. This atlas follows the standard format, with no limit on visits or time spent in any tetrad. Preliminary results are revealing, showing differences in altitude, land use and distribution of several species within the Clyde recording area. Differences in methodologies between the Local Atlases and the New Atlas were highlighted, and some of the colonial species, such as Rook and Sand Martin, obviously require targeting, and more than two hours to accurately discover their distribution and numbers. The Clyde Tetrad Atlas has already shown its worth, having been consulted by NCC and Local Authorities on local conservation issues and planning applications.

Mike Leven then spoke on the SE Scotland Local Atlas undertaken by the Lothian and Borders Branch of the SOC, which follows a similar format to Clyde. The situation in the Lothians is largely modified by agricultural practice. Much of the east is abnormally sparse of breeding species, but some pockets are excellent. Surprisingly, perhaps, former mining areas of West Lothian as well as wooded glens in Midlothian have very good bird communities. Like Iain, Mike expressed some reservations on the New Atlas, but emphasised that both were running well together in SE Scotland.

After lunch Helen Riley spoke on her work at Stirling University on House Martins and the problems of egg-dumping, (birds laying in nests other than their own), solved by the Hi-Tech method of genetic fingerprinting. This method of certain parental identification could have other applications in ornithology, for example claims of captive-bred raptors could be established without doubt, at any age. It also has extensive applications to human society but the Chairman ruled all discussion of participants' parentage strictly out of order!

Ian Langford of Edinburgh University then spoke entertainingly on his Barn Owl studies in South West Scotland. Ian showed how to age and sex Barn Owls and how the activities and diets of the birds could be studied by photography and with remote sensors, taking pictures each time the birds arrived back at the nest with prey. Claims in the literature that Barn Owls could predict bad weather were refuted by Ian who suggested that their daytime activities were more likely to be linked to a previous wet night, which they, like most of us, don't like.

Tea was followed by a talk on the Birds of Estuaries Equiry by Jeff Kirby of BTO, with particular emphasis on the Scottish estuaries. 40% of all European waders use the estuaries of Britain, and these have been counted regularly by wader enthusiasts for several years. Potential counters may have been put off by Jeff's photo of a single flock of 20,000 Knots on Morecambe Bay! However more manageable numbers are the norm in Scotland and it is clear that such long-term monitoring has much to recommend it. In Scotland the most important species include Redshank, which shows a steady decline nationally, but is still relative stable in Scotland, and Dunlin, declining in its Forth stronghold. In contrast, Grey Plover is increasing.

The final talk of the day was by Jeremy Greenwood, Director of the BTO, who spoke on the work of the Trust. Fluctuations in bird populations are monitored by surveys of species and their habitats and long term trends can be followed. The organisation of National Surveys of selected species is one of the most important functions of the Trust, and have great conservation value. Jeremy urged birdwatchers not to die in the course of their long-term monitoring work as this interfered with continuity.

The conference was closed by the President of the SOC and I am sure this will be remembered by those who attended as one of the more thought-provoking conferences of recent years. One sad note was the announcement of the death of Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, who will be sorely missed by ornithologists in Scotland and beyond.

Bernard Zonfrillo

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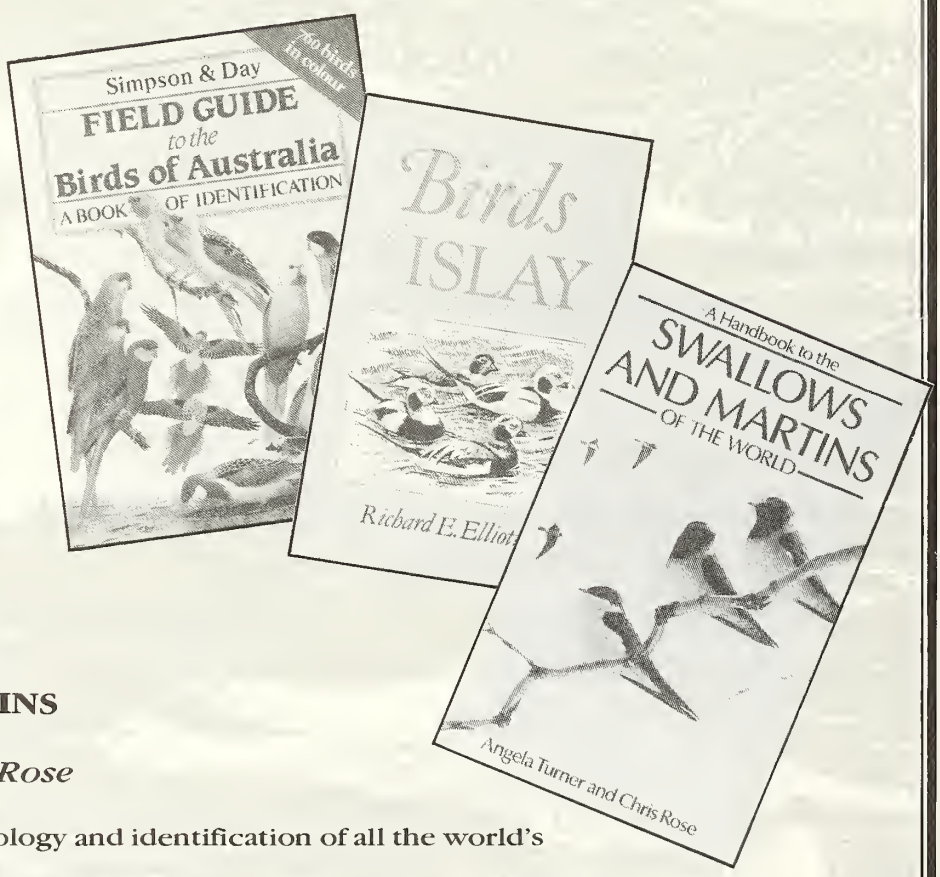

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Reviews

Field Guide to the Birds of Australia *by Ken Simpson and Nicolas Day; Christopher Helm; 1988; 352 pp; £11.95.*

This 3rd edition of Simpson & Day's "Birds of Australia" has been reduced to field guide size. It needs a poacher's pocket at 22 × 16 × 2½ cm and 750 gm, but this must be expected when 760 species are covered. Every species is illustrated in colour by Nicolas Day. The plates, two of which are new, are beautifully reproduced. Attention is drawn to subtle distinguishing features with arrows. There is a distribution map for each species, and a 70-page "handbook" at the end of the guide gives useful information on habitats, nesting, and breeding seasons.

William G. Harper

Birdwatching in the Lothians *by Ian J Andrews; 1989; 82 pp., many dwgs & maps; SOC Lothians Branch; £3.50.*

This pocket size paperback can be warmly recommended to anyone birding in the Lothians. *SBN*'s former Assistant Editor has gathered together articles on good local sites first printed in the monthly *SE Scotland Bird Bulletin* and written up some extra sites himself. Despite the number of contributors this is an easy and enjoyable read with locations and directions clearly explained though I found the maps rather variable in clarity and a few authors would have benefited from tighter editing. This is the ideal companion to *Birds of the Lothians.*

Mike Ashley

Birds of Islay *by Richard Elliot; Christopher Helm; 1989; 224 pp., line dwgs & maps; £11.95.*

Any Club member who hasn't been to Islay should do so without delay since the "Queen of the Hebrides" is one of the finest islands for birdwatching in Europe. Best known for its thousands of wintering geese Islay is good at any season with resident raptors and Choughs and summering Corncrakes to mention a few of the c.100 species that can be expected in even a short visit. The author of this new avifauna first visited Islay 14 years ago and is now a resident; more importantly he has consulted widely before publishing and this shows in several parts of the book, notably the chapters on History and Habitat and Bird and Man in Islay. These give a most useful background to current controversies on land use and conservation. The species accounts follow the usual pattern and cover over 250 birds. The author has generously donated his royalties to the Islay Natural History Trust. Unfortunately I have to make a few criticisms, as much of the publisher as the author. Tighter editing would have taken out material that is largely irrelevant in a book of this sort eg. birds' diets (mostly not specific to Islay), how birds fly and the introductory poem. The drawings scattered through the text are often reproduced too large and some appear heavy as a result. My biggest complaint is the price ..... a few pence short of £12 is excessive for a smallish, softback and compares poorly with Gordon Booth's 1975 *Birds in Islay* which cost £2.50 and, though with less text, had colour photos.

Stan da Prato

Bird habitats of Great Britain and Ireland *by Paul Morrison; Michael Joseph; 1989; 256 pp.c.200 col. photos; £16.95.*

The cover of this attractively illustrated book claims it is a "new approach to birdwatching ..... unlike other guides this shows how to identify birds ..... in their natural context". This may help sales to uninformed relatives of birdwatchers desperately looking for suitable presents but it isn't true. Several identification guides now use photos instead of artwork; all are at best a supplement to proper field guides for which good artwork is essential to show the many variations in plumage and posture which can never all be captured in one or two photos. Trying to identify by habitat isn't new either; it always runs into the problem that birds are mobile creatures that can turn up in several different habitat types which is why the original approach of illustrating birds in their families is still the best.

Several reference books are recommended but there are some startling omissions. Neither Rintoul & Baxter or Valerie Thom are in which may account for the many errors on Scottish birds. There is the now customary doom laden reference to the need for conservation "we sit on the knife edge of unalterable change" though in reality most birds seem rather good at colonising man made or altered habitats that give suitable conditions.

The photos are nice and the text should encourage the beginner to take a greater interest in habitat. However publishers would serve their authors and readers better by describing books realistically.

Stan da Prato

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SOC Notices

SOC 200 Club

Members are reminded that details of this new venture were published in *SBN: 13*. Do please support it and help to maintain the internal fabric of our club premises. Remember that it is planned to draw three monthly prizes (£50, £10 and £5), with an additional half yearly one of £250 from next December.

Branch Meetings

The dates of the first branch meetings of next winter's programme are as follows:

Monday, 11th September: Grampian, Borders & Clyde.

Tuesday, 12th September: Lothian, Highland & West Galloway.

Wednesday, 13th September: Ayrshire, Dumfries, Fife & Caithness.

Thursday, 14th September: Tayside & Stirling.

Thursday, 21st September: Stewartry.

The first meeting of the Tayside branch will be in the Chaplaincy Centre, Dundee University with subsequent meetings in the McManus Museum, Albert Square, Dundee.

Lothian Branch Secretary

The new secretary for Lothian branch is **Tony O'Connor (Jnr), 25 Panmure Place, Edinburgh EH3 9HP. Tel. 031-229 8405.**

Annual Conference

This year's Annual Conference will be at the Marine Hotel, North Berwick from Friday 10th to Sunday 12th November. The conference theme is "Scottish Raptors". Details of the conference programme and booking form will be enclosed with the September issue of *SBN*.

Nominations for Council

Nominations for vacancies among the office bearers or elected members of Council must reach the Club Secretary, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh no later than 31st July.

Club Badge

The SOC badge featuring the new Crested Tit logo is now available. Price £3.50 inc. of p&p from **SOC (Sales), 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.**

Membership Secretary

After sterling service during the gap between Club Secretaries Pat Webster is moving on. Any member interested in the post should phone or write to Maureen Williams at Regent Terrace.

Scottish Birds Index

The index to Vol. 14 is enclosed with this issue of *SBN*. There will be a separate index for Vol. 15. For binding of Scottish Birds copies can be sent to **Riley, Dunn & Wilson, Glasgow Road, Falkirk** who quote the following prices: £10.62 for a volume in Full Buckram and £15.56 for Quarter Leather with return postage an extra. Members may however wish to wait and bind Vols. 14 & 15 together.

Birds of Tiree and Coll

This excellent avifauna, which incorporates the results of the considerable fieldwork done on the islands in recent years, will be published jointly by the Nature Conservancy Council and the SOC this June probably at £6.50.

Birds in Kintyre

For a forthcoming publication on "Birds in Kintyre" birdwatchers are requested to send any records not already published in previous Scottish Bird Reports to: **Eddie Maguire, 13 Toshs Park, Carradale, Campbeltown, Argyll.**

Scottish Bird Records Committee

In 1983 SOC Council appointed Roy Dennis, Roger Broad, Alan Brown, Pete Ellis, Angus Hogg, Brian Marshall and Bernard Zonfrillo to form a committee responsible for adjudicating on records of species that are uncommon in Scotland but are not on the list of species covered by the British Birds Rarities Committee. The first task of the SBRC was to draw up a list of species for which records would require to be substantiated by the submission of a full description. The new committee started examining records from January 1984 and is now an established part of the birdwatching scene.

Although SBRC has gained in stature during this period, with one exception (Ron Forrester replacing Pete Ellis) the membership has remained the same throughout and birdwatchers have had no say in its composition. The Committee is concerned to ensure that birdwatchers throughout Scotland continue to co-operate fully with it, have complete confidence in its decisions and therefore accept the reliability of the records published in the annual *Scottish Bird Report*. The Committee has therefore decided that it must become a properly elected body. With this aim in mind a retirement rota has been drawn up and procedures instigated which will ensure that one vacancy occurs on the committee each year (commencing 1990) for which all SOC members will be asked to put forward nominations. It has also been decided to follow the example of BBRC in allowing local recorders to vote in the event of a ballot. All SOC Local Recorders will each have one vote, no one else (including SBRC members) being eligible to vote. The committee believe this to be both a fair and practical system.

The existing committee members very much hope that club members will not show their usual apathy in such situations but will give much thought to possible candidates in advance of nominations being requested so that more than one candidate is put forward each year ensuring that regular ballots will be necessary.

Ron Forrester, Secretary, SBRC

Scottish Ringers Conference, 1989

The 14th annual conference of bird ringers in Scotland will be held at the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar over the weekend of 18-19 November, 1989. This years conference is being hosted by the Tay Ringing Group. Details of the conference programme and booking forms can be obtained from **Steve Moyes, 1st Floor, 8 Gray's Lane, Lochee, Dunde DD2 3AN.**

Clyde Area Atlas change

Iain Gibson is no longer Atlas Organiser for Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbartonshire. The new man is **John Sweeney, 44 Newton Avenue, Barrhead, Glagow G78 2JY.** Prospective fieldworkers should contact him henceforth.

Change of local recorder

As Ian Andrews is going to work in the Middle East he has handed over responsibility for West Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh Districts, Musselburgh Lagoons and the Forth Islands (except the Isle of May) to **Mike Leven, 43 Riccarton Road, Linlithgow, West Lothian.**

This is an appropriate point at which to thank Ian for all his work for the SOC both in the Lothians Branch and in this magazine and to wish him and his new wife Jill good birding in the desert.

Fair Isle

For 21 years annual awards have been made to young people between the ages of 15 and 21 from the John Harrison Memorial Fund to help with the cost of travel and their stay at the Observatory. Originally 2 or 3 were given £5 each, but in recent years 6/8 awards have been made annually totalling some £700; in the past 10 years £5575 was awarded to 72 successful applicants.

If you wish to apply, or know of anyone who might benefit from a visit to Fair Isle, please write for an application form to the **Hon. Secretary, J.H.M.F., 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.** Also, the National Trust for Scotland administers the Ian Pitman Scholarship Fund which makes annual awards for the same purpose. Application forms can be obtained from the **Hon. Secretary, Ian Pitman Scholarshp Fund, N.T.S., 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4DU.**

Successful applicants are responsible for making their own travel arrangements, and booking at the Observatory where they must stay for at least one week. Details of work which might be undertaken while on Fair Isle must be obtained direct from the Warden on the island. Please remember that applicants must be between 15 and 21 when they visit Fair Isle to qualify for an award. **Application forms must be returned by 31 October at the latest for consideration in mid-December for an award in the following year.**

The Bird Bookshop

The 1989 Spring/Summer Supplement with details of new titles is now available free from the Bird Bookshop. Remember books are sent post free to members. Tel. 031-556 6042 (24 hr service).

Small ads

BIRDWATCHING SITES IN THE LOTHIANS All the well known places like Aberlady, Musselburgh and the Bass and many you need this book to hear about. See the review in this issue. Only £3.50 from the Bird Bookshop.

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Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Mike Ashley

Red Kites return – but to what?

An ambitious project aimed at securing the future of one of Britain's rarest birds of prey began this summer. The joint programme, run by the Nature Conservancy Council and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, aims to re-establish the Red Kite in England and Scotland after an absence of 100 years.

Red Kites were formerly widespread throughout England, Scotland and Wales. In the 19th century persecution led to their disappearing from England and Scotland by 1890. A few pairs remained in Wales at the beginning of the 20th century and, thanks to special protection, they have slowly increased to about 50 pairs today. Although farmers and conservationists have co-operated to protect the kites in central Wales, their rate of increase means there was no realistic prospect of the birds spreading to their former range in the foreseeable future. With such a restricted population occupying only a small part of their potential range they are extremely vulnerable to extinction.

Sea eagle success

The Red Kite project follows the successful reintroduction of the White-tailed Eagle to Scotland. It involved using young eagles from Norway which were flown over and released, just as the kites will be. In 1985, ten years after the start of the eagle project, the first young were reared successfully in the wild and this success has been repeated each year since.

In 1988, work by RSPB and NCC in Wales established that some of the many eggs which would not normally result in fledged kites could be incubated artificially. Young kites reared in this way can be used in this project without adversely affecting the size of the Welsh kite population. In addition, Swedish conservationists have agreed to supply young kites from their small but expanding population.

Kinloss link

In June this year the RAF flew 10 young Swedish kites into Kinloss where Roy Dennis took delivery of the birds in front of a battery of press and TV cameras. Kinloss is, of course, well used to providing transit facilities for rare raptors as the Norwegian sea eagles also came through it.

After a spell in quarantine the young Red Kites will be released into suitable areas which, for obvious reasons, have to be kept secret. However keeping the public in the dark will not save the young kites from deliberate destruction as recently happened in Wales when six Red Kites were illegally poisoned with Fenithion. As readers of SBN will know such criminally irresponsible actions also occur in Scotland though successful prosecutions are rare due to the difficulty of obtaining enough evidence.

Red Kite *Hans Reinhard/Bruce Coleman*

Legal first

In a case which made Scottish legal history, gamekeeper George Rodenhurst was fined £2,600 at Aberdeen Sheriff Court at the end of May for offences including the illegal use of traps and laying poison baits. Birds killed included a Buzzard and a Sparrowhawk, both fully protected species.

This is the first time anyone has been convicted of this offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It had been feared that, because of the need to obtain evidence from witnesses who had actually seen a defendant laying out poison, a conviction might be virtually impossible under Scots Law.

Rodenhurst admitted a series of charges, including setting pole and gin-traps and laying egg, bird and rabbit baits laced with poison. He also admitted demonstrating to estate employees methods of preparing baits, and possessing shotguns without a firearms certificate.

Public danger

Rodenhurst was formerly head keeper at Haddo Estate in Aberdeenshire. The 8,000 acre estate is owned by the Earl of Haddo and run by Captain Colin Farquharson, Lord Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire, who has denied any knowledge of his keeper's illegal activities. Haddo Estate borders the National Trust for Scotland's Haddo House and a Grampian Region country park which attracts thousands of visitors. There are virtually no visible lines of demarcation between the estate and the country park, and the consequences of a schoolchild straying on to the estate and coming in contact with poison are frighteningly obvious.

The case came to court after a trainee keeper on a YTS scheme revealed that he had been shown how to put poison into baits while working at Haddo.

The most revealing feature of the case came when, after sentence, Rodenhurst

continued

Kites return

claimed he knew of 400 estates which have bought alphachloralose for use on their land over the past four years. He also claimed that there are four dealers who make a full-time living dealing in poisons.

Economic pressure

The pressure on keepers to provide good shooting is enormous. Rodenhurst himself had received a bonus of around £3,000 for a 100% increase in game on Haddo though at the cost of local unpopularity; Hitler and Attila being two of his nicknames. He suggested that protection should be introduced for gamekeepers who found that their refusal to use poison was not being accepted.

Now Malcolm Bruce, leader of the Scottish Democrats and MP for the constituency where the poisoning took place, has written to Scottish Agriculture Minister Lord Sanderson, calling for a review of the law relating to gamekeeping covering not just the keepers but also those who own or manage the estates.

Government breaks up NCC

Just as this issue went to the printer in mid July we learned that the Nature Conservancy Council is to be broken into three quite separate entities which, in the case of Scotland and Wales, will be merged with the relevant Countryside Commissions. In England NCC and CC will remain separate "in view of the greater density of population". The proposals have already drawn an unusually blunt statement from NCC's Chairman, Sir William Wilkinson, who said "as far as wildlife is concerned they make little sense; our international reputation in conservation will be damaged; separation will undermine the scientific capability of the NCC and prevent policy advice being provided to Government on conservation issues affecting Britain as a whole." Even stronger comments came from NCC's recently retired Chief Scientist, Dr Derek Ratcliffe, who stated that "Nature conservation has been sold down the river; the Government is pandering to the Scottish establishment; the landowners, the developers and the local politicians will now get a grip of the situation". This led another former NCC scientist, Dr George Black, to write to a Scottish Sunday newspaper declaring that "British conservation policy, of which Ratcliffe was the chief architect, had lost touch with Scottish reality". Dr Ratcliffe's comments bring into the open long running disagreements between the scientific staff at NCC's Peterborough HQ and the agency's Scottish office. Edinburgh has often hinted that it feels Peterborough's PR in Scotland has been poor while Peterborough scientific staff have often felt Edinburgh was too willing to compromise over important conservation issues. Ratcliffe is particularly critical of the Scottish Office, which he regards as one of the least conservation minded ministries. He also criticises the balance of recent appointments to NCC's Council and Advisory Committees as being biassed towards landowning and related interests, such as shooting and forestry.

Concern over the changes has been voiced throughout the voluntary conservation movement. We are all aware of instances where NCC's public relations have been at fault. However, justified criticism of their scientific work is much rarer and it is the blurring of science with recreational, aesthetic and economic values in what is likely to be called a National Heritage Agency that is the greatest concern. At present NCC staff, especially those from the Chief Scientists' Directorate, can offer opinions based purely on conservation grounds. It is then up to Government how to balance that advice with all the other pressures on the area or species in question. Voluntary bodies and the media can follow up cases where the conservation interest seems to have been ignored. This tends to be embarrassing for a Government which has often required pressure from the EEC or the voluntary sector to fulfil its responsibilities, and there has to be the very strong suspicion that the new arrangements are designed to make NCC scientific staff less effective.

International implications

Wildlife, especially birds, moves freely over political barriers and the proposed changes seem to fly in the face of all we know about migration as well as the increased spirit of co-operation among European politicians. It does not seem economic to have three separate groups of scientists looking at what will often be the same problems. Then there is the question of how Britain will respond to EEC and other international conservation initiatives. It seems the Secretary of State for the Environment will do this, presumably asking for advice from one, two or three of the new agencies as he deems appropriate; there seems to be no mechanism for integrating that advice in an ecologically meaningful way. What criteria will be used to determine priorities is not clear – and a major worry is that there will be pressure to downgrade protection for species and habitats such as geese, raptors and estuaries that appear common in Scotland but where we hold significant proportions of the European whole. What about woodland birds like Marsh Tits that are scarce in Scotland but common further south? What about licensing arrangements for ringers, Schedule one species etc? How will the three agencies deal with the B.T.O., which has done so much to build up Britain's reputation in ornithology, with an army of volunteers providing NCC with data that would cost a fortune if paid for at professional rates?

What do you think?

There are good arguments for an integrated land use policy in Scotland but there is no evidence that is going to come with the new agency. What is going to come is still very vague and I have written to the Secretary of State asking for clarification of the points raised here, as well as how and in what proportions conservation interests are to be represented. I have also urged that, if the changes go ahead, some sort of UK group of ecologists is still needed to give independent advice on conservation matters and liaise with the EEC and other international bodies. SOC Council will discuss this issue about the time you receive *SBN*; if you have comments you wish to make through the Club you can put them forward directly to me or via your Branch Committee.

Stan da Prato
President

Pentland Peregrines

Peregrines have so much to contend with, from pesticides and persecution to egg collectors and falconers, that it is depressing to have to report that the well known pair in the Pentlands, near Edinburgh, failed in 1989 almost certainly due to birdwatchers. The pair had reared young for several years on a site above a well known footpath used by many thousands of walkers each spring. Usually the incubating bird sat tight but would fly off if observers left the track to come towards the nest. On several occasions this spring a local shepherd saw birdwatchers doing this; even setting up 'scopes and tripods not far below the nest. Some people did not even have the common sense to move off when the outcome of their irresponsible behaviour was pointed out to them. As a result the eggs all failed at the point of hatching, a particularly vulnerable time for Peregrines.

This behaviour by a selfish or ignorant minority is completely atypical of birdwatchers as a whole but is liable to tar everyone with the same brush. There are many, including some conservationists, who are only to eager to denounce disturbance as the main threat to rare species and use it as an excuse to limit public access to the outdoors. Should Club members come across anyone behaving irresponsibly near a nest, even of a common species, they should not hesitate to point this out. Should SOC Council ever receive evidence that a member has deliberately behaved in this way then they will not hesitate to expel him or her from the SOC.

Stan da Prato

Nets kill seabirds

The extent to which Scottish seabirds are being killed by fishing nets, especially modern monofilament types which are hard to see, cheap to make and deployed in the sea literally for miles, is becoming more apparent. The BTO Ringing Office has found that between a quarter and a third of Guillemots and Razorbill recoveries are now from birds caught in nets (it used to be about one in twenty) despite the fact that many fishermen will not return rings as they draw attention to the scale of the problem. There have been a number of reports of birds dying in nets visible from the shore (see the July/August *BTO News* for a Scottish example) but the greatest mortality will occur at sea where witnesses are rare. Some idea of what is happening comes from a fishery protection official concerned about illegal drift netting for salmon off the west coast: "There was a wall of netting 60 miles out into the Atlantic west of Barr Head ..... In one abandoned net we found 20 salmon, various other fish, including small sharks, seals, a porpoise and 360 seabirds."

This is a world wide problem and one that is getting worse. Some estimates of kills run into hundreds of thousands of seabirds and thousands of marine mammals, especially in the Pacific. One estimate is that Japanese and Taiwanese boats could make some tuna populations commercially extinct within only two years. Species associated with the tuna, such as dolphins, are bound to suffer as are some of the poorest people on earth, Pacific islanders, who rely on fishing using more traditional methods.

Goosander culls in the Borders

Goosanders are among our most beautiful waterbirds. Of course they eat fish but is that sufficient reason for hundreds to be killed by the River Tweed Commissioners?

Culling takes place in late spring in order to protect the run of Salmon smolt downriver to the sea. As Goosanders are protected, the Commissioners have to apply annually to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Scotland, (DAFS) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act in order to cull both Goosanders and Cormorants. In most years an open licence allowing an unspecified number of birds to be culled is applied for and routinely granted.

It was when the size of the 1988 cull was revealed that concern was raised. A total of 256 birds were killed under licence that spring. This figure represents a significant proportion of the Goosanders thought to inhabit the Tweed at that time of year.

The Borders SOC and the Northumberland Ringing Group have conducted four spring and two summer counts of Goosanders since 1984 that allow us to get a fairly good idea of the numbers of birds present at those times. The most recent counts, in 1987, produced min-max figures of 458-561 birds. Even allowing for those areas of the river not covered, it seems unlikely that the actual figure will be in excess of 700 birds at any one time.

The Tweed population of Goosanders is one of the biggest in Britain, representing 15-20% of the wintering population and perhaps 10-15% of the breeding population.

The shooting of 256 birds therefore seemed quite excessive, representing somewhere between 35-55% of the total March population, although some of the 256 killed would have been passage migrants. It was also revealed that two-thirds of all Goosanders shot under licence in Britain were shot on the Tweed. The NCC raised objections with DAFS and successfully limited the 1989 cull to 30 birds, in spite of vociferous objections from the Tweed Commissioners.

Local opinion

The news of the 1988 cull and the cut in the size of the 1989 cull produced protests and a flurry of letters for and against killing Goosanders in the Borders press. The crux of the matter remains the wording of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This states that DAFS will only issue a licence to cull Goosander when the complainant, in this case the Tweed Commissioners, can prove *serious damage to stocks* of Salmon. There appears to be widespread agreement that numbers of Salmon fry and parr are density dependent, that is controlled by the amount of food available to them, and thus unaffected by the numbers of predators. It is the predator-prey relationship at the smolt stage that is critical.

There is little doubt that Goosanders do eat smolts but it is here that questions have to be raised and adequately answered before large scale killing should be allowed.

Do Goosanders damage Salmon stocks? If they do damage stocks, is the damage serious enough to allow culling, as the law states it must be? If serious damage is suspected can it be proved beyond reasonable doubt? How many smolts are there in the river and how many are predated there compared to those predated at sea? Finally, how does the size of the smolt run determine the numbers of adult fish returning to the river?

Goosander drake *Mike Ashley*

Inadequate information

As yet there appears to be no answer to any of these questions. The NCC, the advisory arm of government, does not know the answer and has only recently contemplated research. Dr Mick Marquiss is currently looking into the question in the Grampian area but there seems to be no guarantee that his research will continue to be financed. Meanwhile DAFS continues to allow the indiscriminant shooting of Goosanders when the law specifically states that applicant for licences must prove that *serious damage* is occurring.

Conflicting counts

In an attempt to prove damage the Tweed Commissioners conducted a survey of Goosanders on the beats of all the river bailiffs in their employ in April 1989. They produced a figure of 1,080 birds, two to three times higher than the four earlier counts conducted by the Borders SOC and the Northumberland Ringing Group. Indeed they suspected the true figure to be 2,000 birds, well above the counts of up to 2,400 birds known to occur in the *whole* of Britain in March, based on many years Wildfowl Counts.

While I cannot pretend to be neutral in this argument, as organiser of the SOC counts, I endeavoured to make my estimates of the Tweed Goosander population as large as was reasonable in order to emphasise their national significance, but I'm afraid I was quite unable to reach anything like the Tweed Commissioners' figures. The local NCC Assistant Regional officer counted a stretch and obtained similar figures to the SOC count.

Not enough Salmon

The central problem, of course, is that there are not enough Salmon appearing in the river to satisfy the fishing lobby and Goosanders (and Cormorants) are the scapegoats.

It is very noticeable that the buying out of the netting licences on the lower Tweed by the Atlantic Salmon Trust in the last two years resulted in one of the best runs of fish for many years in 1988/89. It appears that Goosanders are easier to deal with than Greenland and Faroese fishermen, drift netters off the coast (legal and illegal) and the numerous poachers upstream.

Moratorium

I feel the authorities should stick to the letter of the law and require proof of serious damage to stocks. This ought to result in a moratorium on culling until there is proof one way or the other. The next best solution would be to target the cull on those birds that are most likely to be doing damage (if any). These are typically on the lower parts of the river where non-breeders gather prior to the departure to moulting grounds off Norway. This would, at least, minimise damage to breeding Goosanders which are normally located further upstream at that time. One thing is certain, indiscriminate culling on the scale that occurred in 1988 would be a disaster to one of the most attractive birds of the Tweed.

Ray Murray

The 1989 breeding season in Scotland

Once again we are giving readers a summary of what fieldworkers thought were the main features of the 89 season. These are first impressions and in no way meant to pre-empt the fuller analyses that will appear in due course when the results of Common and Waterbird Censuses, Raptor and Seabird Group monitoring schemes are available. As always fieldworkers found local differences, emphasising the need for national monitoring schemes with as many contributions as possible.

One thing that struck everyone was the weather. The winter had been mild, but damp, and many birds had come through it in above average numbers. The early part of the spring had some wet weather but May, June and early July were all warmer and drier than in many recent years. These factors seem to have benefited many, but by no means all, birds. There was also evidence that conditions in Africa were better for many long distance migrants. Weather is not the only factor that affects birds and some species, notably owls, raptors and seabirds, had problems with their food supplies.

Puffins in the Forth *SdP*

Voles down

As 1988 was an exceptional year for birds like Short-eared Owls it was not really a surprise that 1989 was less favourable. Voles, which had been in very high numbers in many areas, crashed and this affected owls and several diurnal raptors. In the South West Geoff Shaw had only one successful Barn Owl out of around 40 nests surveyed by the end of June. The weather helped some raptors and it seems that the vole problem was worst in some upland areas. Gordon Riddle reports Kestrels rearing an average of three young per pair in parts of Ayrshire with very few chicks dying in the nest.

It was not just natural factors that hit the raptors. Hen Harriers and Peregrines were again hammered by egg collectors, falconers and game keepers in several areas, something we shall hear more of when the Raptor Round Up appears. On the bright side Osprey expansion continued.

Varying fortunes

Ground nesting birds appear to have had a mixed season with conflicting reports about species like Snipe, Coot and Moorhen which were all down at Aberlady Bay but up elsewhere. This may reflect different weather conditions; Aberlady is in the dry south east and it may be that it was just too dry for birds that rely on invertebrates. Crows are another factor that certainly have some effect on birds like waders. A big and widespread influx of Quail in June may have been in response to the warm weather.

The picture with seabirds was also far from uniform. Problems continued in Shetland. Kittiwakes and terns have been doing badly for some years; Puffins are now also in serious trouble with very few chicks being reared. The ban on sandeel fishing announced during the summer may help in the long term but was too late for 1989. Seabirds also did badly on Canna – except Herring Gulls, which increased there against the national trend – but numbers continued to increase on many islands in the Firth of Forth. On the Isle of May Mike Harris and Sarah Wanless report that all species did well. Most were early, with the young of most cliff nesting auks fledged by the end of June. Terns continued to increase to c. 350 pairs of 'comics' and many young were flying in July. These southern colonies have not experienced he feeding problems of those in Shetland, though there are signs that food is no longer as easy to find as it was. Some tern chicks died in East Lothian and Kittiwakes seemed to spend more time away from their nests foraging.

Small birds benefit

Small birds mostly did well but there were exceptions. The mild winter must have helped Wrens, wagtails, Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits, all of which were reported in better numbers than for many years. Goldcrests were also seen moving into deciduous woodland, which they tend to do when their numbers are high. However, Treecreepers were scarce on several woodland census plots for reasons that are not at all clear. One result of high population levels is that birds often lay smaller clutches and/or rear fewer chicks, though this is also affected by food supply during the breeding season. Many respondents commented that Blue and Great Tits had a poorish season with small clutches in nestboxes, though fledging success of those that hatched was reasonable. However the full picture is not clear since the number of breeding pairs was actually lower than expected in some census plots, notably Henry Robb's in West Stirling and Perthshire. Woodpecker predation on nest boxes is increasing but is confined to a few areas and certainly does not account for the low success by titmice in several nest box schemes.

Many resident small birds did do well. Kingfishers seem to be up on several rivers and several finches, notably Goldfinch and Redpoll, were mentioned as increasing. Redpoll, of course, were at record levels in the late 70's before experiencing a population crash. Several observers mentioned oil seed rape as helping birds; one of the few compliments this crop has received. In some parts of Scotland "set aside" and other effects of agricultural surpluses, and the downturn in farming, have led to more weeds in fields. This undoubtedly helps many birds and some of the talk of a "derelict countryside" if land goes out of agriculture needs to be corrected. Again the Corn Bunting was quoted as extinct, or nearing extinction, in many areas.

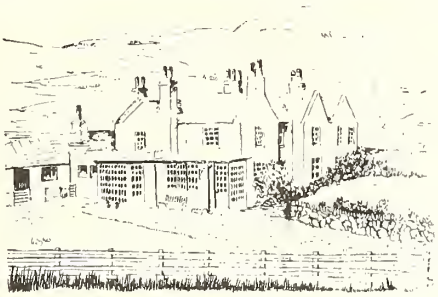
Long distance migrants

Summer visitors were mostly reported in good numbers. Sand Martin passage was higher than for some time and there were follow up reports of good numbers in places like the River Tweed, Swallows may have been down a little. Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers were at their highest for years. In parts of Lothian Whitethroats were actually more obvious than Willow Warblers! Lesser Whitethroats continued to do well with some expansion reported. Grasshopper Warblers were well represented in Lothian – even the Editor found a dozen reeling males on a few kilometres of old railway line on one of his rare birding excursions of the spring – but may not have been so numerous elsewhere.

Redstarts did well in several woods with second broods reported. Pied Flycatchers increased, but not by as much as the increase in nest boxes in many woods could have allowed. Their clutch size, like the tits, was also down on average. Spotted Flycatchers, however, were reported as scarce by all but one woodland observer. Wheatear and Tree Pipit may also be down, though rather few people census them.

THANKS to James Brown, Martin Cook, Dave Dick, Peter Duncan, Colin and Rosemary Edwards, Pete Ellis, Stephen Fulford, Peter Gordon, Mike Harris, Alex Joss, P.J. Knowling, James Lough, Donnie MacDonald, Mary Mathews, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Gordon Riddle, David and Laura Robertson, Henry Robb, Malcolm Ross, Geoff Shaw, Bob Smith, Bob Swann, Sarah Wanless. **APOOGIES** to anyone whose form came in after this went to the printer in mid July. **HELP** is always needed with monitoring. If you are interested contact the BTO (CBC & WBS) or the specialist Seabird and Raptor Groups – if you do not know the addresses we can supply them.

Stan da Prato



Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £38.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-lines is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £70.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £10 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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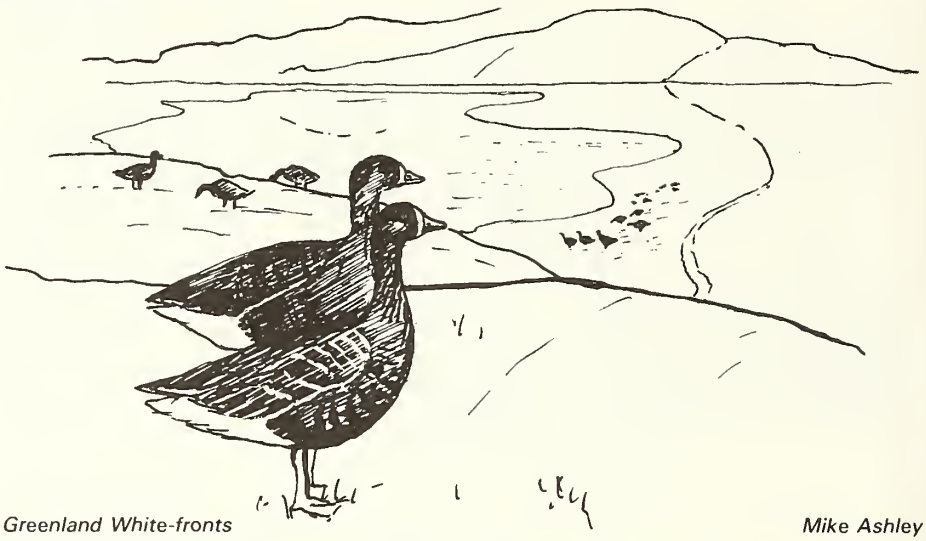
Birds on Coll and Tiree

Coll and Tiree are two of the more interesting Scottish islands but until now lacked a comprehensive book on their birds. Recently a good deal of work has been done on both islands, much of it sponsored by the Nature Conservancy Council, who recognised that they are of major importance for nature conservation due to the range of habitats and traditional patterns of land use. As a result the islands hold important populations of several species. Work by NCC, RSPB and other interested parties is now summarised in a new book published jointly by NCC and the SOC.

This is a rather different book to the conventional local avifauna. As well as describing the birds it discusses what factors are important for their requirements and conservation. This should help local people plan agriculture and other activities in a way that allows birdlife to continue to flourish. It should also be relevant elsewhere either in integrating conservation with developments such as the Agricultural Development Programme or in modifying farming methods now EEC surpluses have grown so large that production for its own sake is increasingly being questioned.



Greenland White-fronts *Mike Ashley*

Bird habitats on Coll and Tiree

Both islands are low lying with ancient rocks which give an intrinsically poor and acid soil. Tiree is famous for its white, sandy beaches. The accumulation of blown shell sand leads to machair habitat, now utilised as pasture. This unique association of soil and vegetation is restricted to the Atlantic fringe of Scotland and Ireland. On Tiree the area known as the Reef is one of the largest uncultivated machair plains in the Hebrides. It is used for winter grazing and regenerates during the summer when it can be knee deep in wild flowers.

Water is never far from the surface and there are many pools, marshes, fens and bogs, all important for birds. Rocky shores and cliffs occur and are used by breeding seabirds and some waders. There is evidence of former tree cover in the form of woodland plants, such as wild hyacinth, though few trees grow today and most of those that do have been planted.

Coll is shaped differently to Tiree and has more heathland, bog and many lochans, important to waterbirds. Grazing pressure is less intense and the plant communities on the Coll machair are rather different to those on Tiree.

Besides croftland, which is of critical importance for breeding waders, there are a number of places where human influence has provided bird habitat. Old buildings and wartime gum emplacements provide nest sites for Rock Doves while the broken up runways on Tiree, which also date from 1939-45, now form a shingle like habitat particularly attractive to Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers.

Breeding waders

Tiree and Coll hold densities of breeding waders rarely equalled in Britain except in parts of the Outer Hebrides. Nowhere else in the U.K. do Oystercatchers, Ringed Plovers, Lapwings, Dunlin, Snipe and Redshanks breed in such numbers and in such close proximity. As the total area concerned is so much larger than on more southern sites, such as mainland saltmarshes, these machairs are internationally important for their breeding wader populations alone. Specific examples include the 4.5 km.sq. of the Reef which, when surveyed in 1987-88, held 310+ pairs of Lapwing, 56+ pairs of Ringed Plover, 110 pairs of Dunlin, 100+ pairs of Snipe, 80+ pairs of Redshank and 20+ pairs of Oystercatcher.

It is estimated that c. 10,500 pairs of waders breed on the two islands. Six species have over 1% of their British population breeding there. Breeding waders do not occur uniformly over all the habitat types. The highest numbers, though not the highest densities, occur on dry machair (17% of all the breeding waders) as this forms such a high proportion of the land area, especially on Tiree. Marsh and fen hold the second highest numbers as well as the highest overall density (excluding the small and somewhat artificial derelict runways!) although their total area is only 180 hectares. Coarse, wet pasture and wet, acidic grassland are also important. It should be noted that even the areas with lower densities would be considered important in most parts of Europe, a fact which demonstrates the importance of sympathetic management for all these areas and not just the "honeypots". Damp areas are particularly important once wader chicks hatch due to their invertebrate numbers. Mosaics of habitat are also important as they allow adults to easily take their chicks to good feeding sites. This means that wetland areas are likely to be even more important than figures obtained in the early part of the season, when birds are territorial and easily censused, suggest. Although productivity differences between habitats have not been studied on Coll and Tiree information from elsewhere in Europe indicates that high breeding density is linked to good chick productivity because the parent birds can more efficiently deter predators.

Wintering waders

Tiree's wide, sandy beaches are important for non breeding waders. Fifteen species occur of which Ringed Plovers, Sanderlings and Turnstones are numerous enough to be of international importance. There are also nationally important numbers of Ringed Plovers on Coll and of Purple Sandpipers on Tiree. Significant numbers of Lapwing use inland areas in winter. Fortunately these birds are less sensitive to management changes than breeding waders on agricultural land.

Waterfowl

The shallow but rich lochs of Tiree hold one of the most diverse assemblies of breeding and wintering ducks in the west of Scotland. Breeding ducks include Gadwall, Pintail, Wigeon and Shoveler as well as more widespread species such as Mallard, Teal, Tufted, Eider and Shelduck. Other interesting breeding waterfowl include Red-throated Divers and Greylag Geese.

In late summer Loch a'Phuill is important to moulting Mute Swans, some coming over from the Outer Hebrides. Many passage waterfowl use both islands, notably Icelandic Whooper Swans, a species that also winters and sometimes summers.

Wintering geese

Around 1,000 Greenland White-fronts occur widely throughout both islands. The Reef on Tiree by itself is internationally important as a roosting and feeding area and regularly holds over 200 (c. 3% of the British population) of a species that is one of the least numerous geese in the world. Fortunately there are few conflicts with agriculture; the existence of so many damp, grazed areas is attractive to the geese and their numbers have not so far brought demands for culling, as on Islay. Around 700 Barnacle Geese, from the east Greenland population, also winter. This population has been extensively colour ringed and birds marked in Greenland have been seen on Coll and Tiree. There have also been movements to and from Ireland and Islay. At present the Barnacles use a limited area of the islands; any redistribution could lead to problems as this species readily uses improved grasslands.

Seabirds

There are no very large colonies though the presence of 15 of the 24 British breeding species is of interest. Up to 80 pairs of Little Terns breed on dunes and beaches on both islands. One reason for such good numbers of a species that is in trouble on many mainland coasts is the lower level of disturbance.

Several species, such as Gannet and Manx Shearwater, do not breed but regularly occur in the surrounding seas. The increasing number of birdwatchers coming by ferry has been reflected in more records of scarcer species such as Great and Sooty Shearwaters, small petrels, all four skuas and Sabines Gull.

Birds of agriculture

Tiree and to a lesser extent Coll are important to birds such as the Corncrake and Corn Bunting that have disappeared from many other parts of the British Isles. The world range of the Corncrake is largely within the Western Palearctic where the total for Western Europe may now be no more than 5,000 pairs. Current estimates of the British (600 pairs) and Irish (930 pairs) populations underline how important the 120 pairs on Coll and Tiree are. Unlike some other western islands there has been no recent decline in Corncrakes on Coll or Tiree, probably because grass is still grown for hay and little silage is made.

Corn Buntings are not threatened on a European scale in the same way as Corncrakes. However they could become extinct in the Hebrides and are already scarce or absent in many of their former haunts on the Scottish mainland. Tiree currently seems to be the only island in the Inner Hebrides with a breeding population. The causes of the decline in this species are not properly understood.

A number of other species use fields on the islands including large flocks of Twite in autumn.

Other birds

Around 300 species have been recorded on Coll, Gunna and Tiree. As with all islands these include a high proportion of vagrants that the visitor is most unlikely to see, such as the female Magnificent Frigate Bird that died on Tiree in 1953. Its skin is now in the Royal Scottish Museum and identifies it as being of the Caribbean race; it is still the only Scottish record. There are few records of other American species which may reflect lack of observer coverage at the appropriate times of year. Several regular migrants of Nearctic origin include pale bellied Brent Geese en route to Ireland and many waders moving up and down to Greenland and Canada.

The impact of man

People have affected the vegetation for at least 2,000 years. Peat has been cut and trees and scrub removed by a population that used to be over double its present number. Traditional farming systems are responsible for much of the current wildlife interest. Improved transport and grants have led to an increase in the numbers of sheep and cattle. Modern techniques for maximising the yield of grass, such as fertilizers and silage production, are likely to affect birds as are drainage schemes. Birdwatchers can play an important part in conserving the wildlife on these islands by visiting them and stressing that the reason for your visit is to see birds.

The 191 page book on which this article is based is available from the SOC and excellent value at £6.50. Tourist information for the islands is available from the ***Oban, Mull & District Tourist Board, Boswell House, Argyll Square, Oban PA34 4AN, 0631-63122.***

Bird records should be sent to the local recorder: ***Mike Madders, Smithy College, Loch Dron, Craignure, Isle of Mull*** *for inclusion in the Argyll and Scottish Bird Reports.*

Corncrake *Mike Ashley*

Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland

by J. N. Dymond, P. A. Fraser and S. J. M. Gantlett

This book by a trio of rare-bird specialists is a successor to two earlier works (long out of print), *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1974) and *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1976). It unifies both of the earlier books and updates them, adding more than 80 species to the previous total.

The authors have analysed and considered some 45,000 records of scarce and rare birds in Britain and Ireland for the period 1958–85. Extreme rarities outside the period are also listed.

More than 300 species accounts are included, most of them accompanied by histograms of weekly and seasonal occurrences, with maps showing distribution by counties in spring and autumn or at particular times of year. For rarities with twelve or fewer occurrences during the period 1958–85, the place, date and other relevant information is given for each record.

Every species is illustrated by a line drawing, more than 150 of them commissioned for this book, the remainder being selected from the two earlier works.

Thanks to the expertise and diligence of the authors the reader has a complete picture for more than 300 species of rarities in these islands and can readily discover:

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WHERE were they seen

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Birds in Ireland

by Clive D. Hutchinson

The author, a leading Irish ornithologist, has compiled this comprehensive review of birds in the Republic and Northern Ireland.

(The book is a companion volume to Valerie Thom's *Birds in Scotland*).

26.5 x 19 cm, 212 pages, £19.00 net

T & A D POYSER

Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period April to June is covered here.*

Easterly winds were in short supply during the spring. The more common migrants occurred in low numbers, although there were a couple of good falls around 12 May and 21 May. Perhaps the most notable feature of the spring was the mass invasion of **Quail** which were often heard, but seldom seen, in many parts of Scotland. The breeding season brought mixed fortunes to our breeding birds. Shetland's seabirds had another disastrous breeding season, and in southern Scotland there were reports of many **Peregrine** nests failing due to robberies of eggs and young. Scotland gained a new breeding species when **Nuthatches** were confirmed breeding in the Borders.

The Whalsay **White-billed Diver** stayed into April, with an immature bird in Shetland in early June. A **Black-necked Grebe** off North Ronaldsay was the second Orkney record. **Little Egrets** visited Spiggie and Uig in Lewis, a **Great White Egret** was recorded south of Aberdeen and a **White Stork** was at Hailes. **Bean Geese** occurred near Stornoway, with another at Tyninghame. A pair of **Mandarins** were at Grantshouse, whilst 2 males visited Foula. A **Green-winged Teal** stayed briefly in Shetland and a **Blue-winged Teal** on Sanday. It was a good spring for **Garganey**, with reports totalling at least 26 individuals. There were 7 reports of **King Eider.** Following last year's excellent breeding season for **Long-tailed Ducks**, larger numbers than usual stayed around our shores, with the largest flock of immatures reported being 100 at Gullane in early June. At nearby Gosford the flock of **Surf Scoters** reached 11 in April. A drake **Smew** was at Gladhouse on 22 May and **Ruddy Ducks** reached as far north as Shetland, while a pair bred in Lothian.

It was a good spring for migrant raptors which included a **Honey Buzzard** on North Ronaldsay, several **Black Kites, White-tailed Eagles** in Orkney, a minimum of 16 **Marsh Harriers,** at least 11 **Rough-legged Buzzards,** 2 **Red-footed Falcons,** a good scattering of **Hobbies,** and the usual widespread reports of migrant **Ospreys.** The **Quail** invasion brought reports from many areas, the highest estimates being about 100 in Grampian, 80 in Lanarkshire and a staggering 1000 in Lothian. A **Spotted Crake** was seen in Lerwick, another on Stronsay and singles heard calling at 3 sites in Grampian. There were several records of **Corncrakes** outside their normal areas. Single **Cranes** occurred from Shetland to Lothian. The luckiest birder in Scotland this spring was the only one to see a fine male **Little Bustard** on North Ronaldsay on 23 May.

Avocets visited Livingston and Tyninghame and a **Stone Curlew** was at St. Abbs. 190 immature **Grey Plover** summered at Aberlady. **Temminck's Stints** were reported widely. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was at Hillwell Loch and another at Strathbeg. Orkney's first **Great Snipe** was on North Ronaldsay, while the wintering **Long-billed Dowitcher** on Unst remained into late April.

A small passage of **Pomarine Skuas** brought 7 to Orkney in early May, whilst **Long-tailed Skuas** were reported on Fair Isle and Orkney. Unusual Gulls included 2 **Mediterraneans** in Aberdeenshire and another at Irvine, 4 **Little Gulls** in Orkney and 1 in Lewis, a **Sabine's Gull** off Hoy, a **Bonaparte's Gull** at Fraserburgh, a **Ring-billed Gull** in Orkney and single **Yellow-legged Herring Gulls** in Orkney and at Turnberry. A **White-winged Black Tern** visited Meikle Loch. The first **Brunnich's Guillemot** ever seen in a breeding colony in Britain was found at Sumburgh Head in June and attracted several hundred twitchers.

The male **Snowy Owl** which came to Scotland as a stowaway on an oil tanker from Canada was released to join the 2 resident females on Fetlar in April, but soon left the island and turned up on the opposite side of Shetland in June.

Colourful visitors from southern Europe included up to 5 **Bee-eaters** in Scalloway, another on North Ronaldsay, a **Roller** in the Lothians and 2 **Hoopoes** and 5 **Wrynecks** in Shetland. Fair Isle had a **Short-toed Lark,** whilst there was a **Shore Lark** on Unst. Aberdeenshire produced 2 **Richard's Pipits** and North Rona a **Red-throated Pipit. Waxwings** on return migration to the far north occurred in several areas. Fair Isle produced no less than 4 **Thrush Nightingales,** with another at Sumburgh. Single **Nightingales** were noted on Unst, Fair Isle and at the Bullers of Buchan. **Bluethroats** were rather scarce.

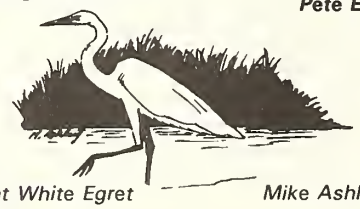
Grasshopper Warblers and **Marsh Warblers** put in a good showing, but only 2 **Reed Warblers** were reported. A **Great Reed Warbler** was in Shetland in late June and there were several **Icterine Warblers. Subalpine Warblers** put on another good show with 9 in Orkney/Shetland. Single **Firecrests** occurred at Fair Isle, Fife Ness and Barns Ness, whilst **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were seen in Shetland and on Fair Isle. **Coal Tits** bred in Lewis for the first time for 20 years, but even more unusual were Scotland's first breeding records of **Nuthatch,** with 2 pairs nesting in the Borders.

Several migrant **Golden Orioles** occurred. **Red-backed Shrikes** were in fairly high numbers. **Great Grey Shrikes** were seen from Shetland to Eyemouth. Fair Isle recorded **36 Carrion Crows** on 2 May, but more colourful was the **Rose-coloured Starling** which visited in June.

Finches of note included **Scarlet Rosefinches** and **Northern Bullfinches** in the Northern Isles and 12 **Hawfinches** in Shetland. **Common Crossbills** bred for the first time in Lewis and East Lothian.

Fair Isle produced a fine **Song Sparrow,** a **Black-headed Bunting,** a **Red-headed Bunting,** a **Rustle Bunting** and a **Little Bunting.** A **White-throated Sparrow** was found near Lerwick, a **Black-headed Bunting** in the Western Highlands, **Red-headed Buntings** on Papa Stour and Eday and a **Yellow-breasted Bunting** at Birsay.

Pete Ellis



Great White Egret *Mike Ashley*

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Garden birds surveys

For the past nineteen winters the BTO has been running its Garden Bird Feeding Survey. Birds coming to garden feeding stations have been recorded in about two hundred gardens in the UK. The survey has allowed us to monitor long term trends in the use of gardens and supplementary food by many of the commoner garden birds. One example is the Siskin which has recently increased its breeding numbers in Scotland as it has rapidly colonised forestry plantations.

The species is notoriously irruptive with peaks corresponding to those years when breeding success and cone crop production led to more Siskins feeding in gardens. Ringing data indicates a recent increase in the number of Scottish recoveries further south and of over-wintering in Ireland, possibly as a result of greater breeding numbers in Scotland. A notable recovery was of a Siskin ringed on 17th July 1986 at Drumnadrochit, Highland Region, and 'captured' in Beni-Saf in Algeria on 15th November 1988.

In the more recent BTO/BASF Garden Bird Survey all birds visiting gardens (not just to feed or drink) are recorded. From this year-round study we can determine seasonal trends in garden use and the influence of various garden habitat features such as feeding or tree types. The 1987/88 data clearly shows the seasonal use of gardens in Scotland, and reflects the shortage of natural food at the end of the winter. Siskins are regularly present in Scottish gardens during the winter because of the proximity of breeding birds. In other regions of the UK they are recorded in good numbers only in 'irruptive' years. The winter of 1987-88 was not an irruptive year, whereas 1988-89 clearly was.

This survey is funded by BASF, one of the world's largest chemical companies, who have generously elected to extend their sponsorhip for a fourth year. If you would like to participate in either of the garden bird surveys mentioned please contact **Lys Muirhead, BTO, Beech Grove, Station Road, Herts., HP 23 5NR.**

Brambling *Edmund Fellowes*

Terminological inexactitudes

Professor Wynne-Edwards has politely pointed out that in the last issue we described the Scottish Crossbill as our only indigenous bird when we should have said endemic. As indigenous means occurring naturally as opposed to introduced by man few of our birds are not indigenous! How many other readers spotted the slip?

Oystercatcher nesting in tree

On 20 May 1989 we were told of an Oystercatcher nesting in a beech tree in full leaf near Broughton, Borders Region. Inspection that day revealed two adult Oystercatchers in fields adjacent to the nest site with two warm eggs in the nest. On 28 May two adults were again present in the same fields, but only one warm egg was in the nest. This egg showed no signs of "starring" nor were any calls heard coming from within it. There were no signs of a recently hatched chick nearby or any alarm calls from the adults. Further visits to the site were not possible, so the eventual outcome of the nest is unknown.

The nest was situated in a depression where the Beech trunk split into main branches, the depression being vegetated by short grass and mosses. Due to the slope of the site, the nest was about 2.5m above ground level on the upslope (improved grassland, grazed by cattle) and about 3m above ground level on the downslope (cereal crops), at an altitude of 235m above sea-level on an east-facing hill.

Although it is known that Oystercatchers nest in a variety of situations above the ground, including dead trees, tree stumps and pollarded willows on the continent, this is the first record we have come across of a nest in a full height living tree, where the incubating bird was possibly at a disadvantage in spotting aerial predators due to leaf-cover, but at an advantage over terrestrial predators and nest-tramplers, such as grazing animals.

Tom Dougall, Stuart Craig, David & Margaret Thorne

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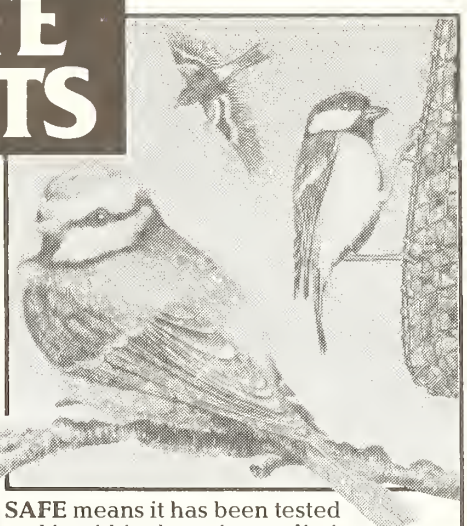

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Photo Spot

This fine action shot of a Gannet in the updraught of air over a seacliff was taken at a Scottish colony by Brian Turner. Brian's camera work has often featured in this magazine and he won our Annual Photographic Competition last year. Apart from the obvious skill with the camera this picture is successful because it was taken on black and white film. Most of us use colour and there is no doubt that slides are the ideal accompaniment to a talk. However few slides convert perfectly to black and white for reproduction and, as monochrome is cheaper and allows you more control at the processing stage, keen photographers continue to use it.

Club Photo Competition

Your chance to impress your friends, and win some credit in the Bird Bookshop, is here again! Entries should be of wild birds photographed in Scotland.

Colour slides will be shown on the Friday evening at the Conference; black and white prints, which are especially welcome, will be displayed. Colour prints are not eligible. Remember the judges are biassed against rare breeding birds photographed at their nests so let's see some stunning Starlings and Sparrows this year. Entries should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace clearly marked Photo Comp by 31st October. Make sure your name and address are on your entries.

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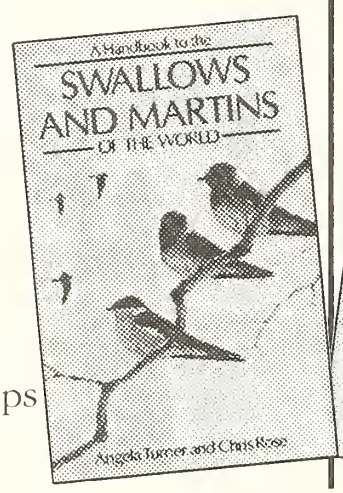

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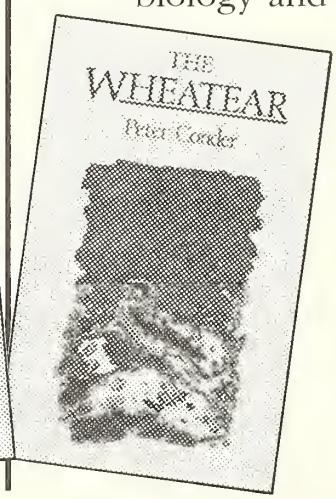

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Reviews

Birds in Ireland; *by Clive Hutchison; T&AD Poyser for the Irish Wildbird Conservancy; 1989; 215 pp. many b&w dwgs. photos maps and diagrams; £19.00.*

Owners of *Birds in Scotland* hardly need telling how well this publisher can produce an avifauna. This book is on similar lines with the accounts for 397 species preceded by chapters on bird distribution in Ireland, conservation and recent changes in status. There are also several appendices which include useful information on local reports and relevant organisations. The book is 167 pages shorter than *Birds in Scotland* and deals with 100 fewer species, underlining the fact that the Irish avifauna is more limited, though the numbers of observers and fieldworkers must also have some effect. The quality of the artwork and photographs is excellent which is what one expects from John Busby and Richard Mills. This book is bound to become the standard reference; it is also of interest to ornithologists in other parts of the British Isles intrigued by the many puzzles of bird distribution within our islands.

Stan da Prato

Important bird areas in Europe; *compiled by R.F.A. Grimmett & T.A. Jones; ICBP Technical Publication No. 9; 880 pp.; many maps and dwgs; £19.50*

This useful source of information has been produced jointly by the European section of the International Council for Bird Preservation and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, with RSPB sponsorship. These organisations decided, correctly, that a supra national survey was needed to match growing concern over bird populations which are rarely confined to a single country, Birds are an appropriate starting point for such an exercise as we know more about their numbers and distribution than other groups. The area covered includes Greenland, Iceland, Svalbard, Fennoscandinavia, the USSR west of the Urals, Turkey and the Atlantic islands such as Madeira, the Canaries and the Azores. Important bird areas are identified for all European states except Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican. With countries such as Albania included coverage is, inevitably, incomplete. For each country there is an introduction which gives a summary of its main ecological and ornithological features, conservation organisations and an inventory of important sites. Birds names are in Latin, though there is a list of English equivalents at the back, and the book is not really intended for a birder looking for holiday ideas. Its great value is in putting sites into an international context, for example the U.K. has one endemic species (Scottish Crossbill) several passerine sub species, three internationally important bird communities/habitats: estuaries, peatlands and heather moor and seabirds, and breeding populations of three globally threatened species (Red Kite, White-tailed Eagle and Corncrake.

This is an excellent reference book for the professional conservationist which amateur birdwatchers can profitably read to deepen their understanding of the birds they watch.

SdP

Living with wildlife *by David Stephen; Canongate; 1989; 177 pp., many colour and b&w photos; £14.95.*

This book commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals but is really the author's own epilogue rather than an account of the society's work. The link is appropriate since David Stephen was keenly aware of animal welfare issues and had considerable experience of caring for a variety of creatures, of both wild and domestic origin. He was also Scottish and proud of it, often writing in lowland Scots vernacular and enjoying contacts with local people from farmers to coal miners. Since most Scots live in the Central Lowlands and some of our most biologically productive land is there he was onto something important. His contribution tended to be personal and emotional, as in his writing and the animal collection at Cumbernauld New Town, rather than in developing a land use strategy that integrates people and wildlife, though he calls for this at the end of the book. He seems to have been more interested in mammals than birds, which, apart from some raptors and owls, are not dealt with in detail. He also shows little awareness of the amount of work amateur birdwatchers do in the way of counts, monitoring etc. This means that, though a few well known names are quoted on eagles or grouse, comments on most birds rarely get beyond personal anecdotes from his bird table or camera hide.

This is a very personal, often idiosyncratic book by a Scotsman whose heart was in the right place.

SdP

Grey Heron *David Mitchell*

The Birds of Egypt *by Steven Goodman and Peter Meininger (eds); Oxford University Press; 1989; 551 pp; £70.00.*

This is the first book on the birds of Egypt since Richard Meinertzhagen's *Nicoll's Birds of Egypt* in 1930. It covers a wealth of new material. Wider exploration of the country in recent years has contributed to the discovery of 34 new breeding species, while an additional 12 species have apparently colonised Egypt since 1930. Twenty new accidental visitors have been added. Part 1 includes chapters on geography, with numerous locality photographs and maps, on conservation and bird protection, bird hunting, and the effects of changing environments. Part 2 is the species list, and includes 103 maps of breeding distributions, and a number of maps of ringing recoveries. There are six colour plates by Sherif Baha el Din covering 41 species, a comprehensive gazetteer, bibliography and indexes. It is a beautifully produced book, as we have come to expect from OUP.

William Harper

Natural history excursions in Tenerife; *by Myrtle & Philip Ashmole; Kidston Mill Press; 1989; 252 pp.; b&w sketches and maps; £7.95.*

Tenerife is one of those useful places where a budget priced family holiday can be combined with excellent wildlife watching As with many islands the range of birds is limited but there are several endemics and distinct sub species and a nice range of seabirds offshore. Keen birders will probably already know localities for all of these via the various photocopied checklists and holiday notes in circulation but it is handy to have them summarised in a genuinely pocket sized paperback. You should see all the endemics using this book though it is a little weak on sea watching opportunities from Tenerife's many headlands. I thought the area by the lighthouse at Punta del Rasca at the south west tip of the island could have been included; SOC members have regularly had Bulmer's and Madeiran Petrels and Little Shearwaters there on dawn and evening watches, along with thousands of Cory's. The Ashmoles, rightly, recommend the Gomera Ferry for seabird (and cetacean) watching but might also have included the longer ferry journey to Fuerteventura via Gran Canaria which gives a longer time at sea plus the endemic Canary Islands Chat at the other end. Paradoxically the most useful features of this book to the birdwatcher are probably the descriptions of the plants and other animals as well as the excellent survey of the habitats on Tenerife. Twenty four excursions are described in detail and there are lists of all the breeding birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, freshwater fish, butterflies, hawkmoths and dragonflies and selective lists of other invertebrates and marine fish – the last especially useful if you visit the excellent seafood restaurants! You would be silly to visit Tenerife without this book.

SdP

The Macmillan Field Guide to Bird Identification *by Alan Harris, Laurel Tucker and Keith Vinicombe; Macmillan; 1989; 224 pp; £14.95.*

The rather bland title gives little indication of what this book contains: a series of essays, similar in style to many identification papers in British Birds, on 'difficult' species/groups. Normal field guides help little with problems such as silent Willow Warbler/Chiffchaffs but this is where this work is invaluable. Explanations are given of how details of plumage and structure, moult sequence or behaviour combine to give a different jizz to such confusion species. The colour plates are superb – detailed yet lifelike, in annotated sketchbook format and complementing the text well. Rarities are dealt with but only where they resemble commoner species e.g. Red-throated and Olive-backed Pipits are considered with Meadow and Tree Pipits. The section on House and Tree Sparrows seems rather out of place here but even these birds sometimes have ID problems and the painting of a hybrid makes one ponder over which features are derived from which parent. If you are at all interested in the correct identification of your birds (surely a prerequisite to any study ?) you will have much to learn from this book. Errors seem few and, although it is rather a small volume, it is excellent value on a 'facts-per-pound' basis. We all need this book!

Peter R Gordon

SOC Notices

1989 Annual Raffle

The Borders Branch has again been asked to arrange the SOC annual raffle. Tickets are enclosed with this issue of *SBN*. They will be on sale during the Conference, and at Branch meetings beforehand, and the draw will be made after the speeches at the annual dinner.

Last year our target, to net over £1,000, was well beaten and we made almost £1,200. The generosity and goodwill of members ensured that all the first prize of £100, and a further £50 which was used towards printing costs, was donated separately to raffle ticket sales. We are once again asking members to consider making a donation towards these costs; this should be sent direct to the promoter Alastair Peirse Duncombe, whose address is on each ticket. Donations of £10 or more will be acknowledged personally.

This year our target is to net £1,500 – ambitious, but easily reached with a little push at meetings and by individual goodwill. If anyone wishes to have more books to sell, please contact the promoter. There is the usual collection of excellent prizes, plus a number donated by Branches with a local flavour.

Borders Branch Committee

SOC 200 Club

The first monthly draw took place in June when an independent witness (a barman in Melrose!) drew Ltd. Cdr. Frank Spragge, Ceres, Fife for the first prize of £20, and Mrs Ruby Smillie, Edinburgh for the second of £10. The number and size of the prizes have to be restricted until we have more members. So, come and join us; help increase the prizes and swell the funds to refurbish the Scottish Centre. For information please write to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NL, or phone Melrose 2176.**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Annual Conference

This year's Annual Conference will be at the Marine Hotel, North Berwick from Friday 10 to Sunday 12 November. The conference theme is Scottish Raptors. The conference programme and booking form is enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

Stirling Branch meeting

Would Stirling members please note that the meeting on 12 October will be held in the Cowane Centre at 7.30 pm.

Winter Field Trips 1989/90

Details of the coming autumn and winter branch field trips are enclosed on a separate sheet with this issue of *SBN*.

FDH – OBE

For those members who don't read Court circulars our Vice-President, Frank Hamilton, was honoured in the last Honours List. Congratulations, Frank.

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook and Diary 1990

Members of the SOC may purchase the yearbook at a special price of £7.25 instead of £8.75 and post free if they order direct from the publishers. **Buckingham Press, Freepost MK 790, Buckingham MK18 1YP.** A leaflet including an order form at this special price is enclosed with this issue.

British Birds

The independent monthly magazine for birdwatchers is again available at the special concessionary rate for SOC members. The enclosed leaflet gives details.

Ecology and Conservation of Owls in Europe

A week-end symposium on owl ecology will be held at Kings Buildings, Edinburgh University, 29 Sept. – 1 Oct. Organised by Edinburgh University, NCC and BTO, the conference will have lectures on most European Owl species, given by leading researchers. Anyone interested should contact **Dr Iain Taylor, Dept. of Forestry & Natural Resources, Univ. of Edinburgh, Kings Buildings, Mayfield Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JU or Dr Steve Percival, BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Herts HP23 5NR.**

New Secretary for Isle of May

Ian Darling has taken over from Bernard Zonfrillo as Hon Secretary of the Isle of May Bird Observatory. With the automation of the lighthouse and the purchase of the island by the Nature Conservancy Council it was decided that the Observatory should formalise its status on the island by reaching a lease agreement on the Low Light with NCC. This guarantees the continuity of recording and ringing operations on the Isle of May. To this end the Observatory has had to re-form itself as a Trust, capable of entering legal contracts. Membership of the Trust will be open to those interested in due course. Details of this and any further correspondence should be sent to **Ian M Darling, West Acres, 579 Lanark Road West, Balerno, Edinburgh EH14 7BL.** Rosemary Cooper remains as Bookings Secretary.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have visited the Observatory during my nine years as Hon Secretary and who have helped make my task both easy and enjoyable. Ian Darling has been a regular visitor to the May for some years now and has made the best of starts to his term in office by renewing the water system and refurbishing the kitchen and washroom at the Low Light. Annual reports covering the years 1985-87 and for 1988 should be available in the autumn, and will be produced regularly thereafter. I wish Ian every success in the years to come.

Bernard Zonfrillo

Atlas forms in please

Two seasons fieldwork for the New Breeding Atlas have now been completed. In order that the whole of Scotland gets surveyed in the allotted three years it is vital that I know well in advance of next season exactly which 10 km squares remain to be atlassed. To this end may I ask everyone who has not yet returned Worksheets to their Local Atlas Organizer to do so at their earliest possible convenience? The sooner you do this then the sooner I will be able to formulate fieldwork strategy for 1990. Preliminary processing of 1989 returns will continue at the rate I receive them and, hopefully, a progress report on the first two years of the survey will appear early in the New Year.

Jim Reid

Scottish Ringers Conference

Another reminder that this popular event will again be at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar, on 18-19 November 1989. Further details from **Steve Moyes, 1st Floor, 8 Gray's Lane, Lochee, Dundee DD2 3AN.**

How is the SOC doing?

As this issue goes to press in July it isn't clear if the 1988-89 Report will be ready to accompany it; it depends when our Auditor finishes checking our accounts. If you don't receive the Annual Report with *SBN* it will be available as in previous years at the AGM. The fact that we are able to consider sending the Report out in advance of the AGM reflects improved efficiency in the office. The Winter Syllabus was also ready much earlier this year and is now printed on a simple card to save us money. Details of the Autumn Conference are enclosed with this mailing and we are starting to plan the Spring one to be held in Dumfriesshire on 10 March, 1990.

As Maureen Williams has been responsible for much of this we are glad to say she is staying on though on a part-time basis to allow her more time with her young son. We are looking at the whole staffing position since Pat Webster left in July and it has become obvious that we don't need two full-time people to run the club.

The Bird Bookshop made a profit in 1988-89, a welcome improvement on the previous year, but probably helped by a volume of BWP appearing. Despite the efforts of Fiona Slack and her staff sales were down in the early part of 1989-90. We expect them to pick up but have to draw members' attention to the more competitive marketplace the Bookshop has to survive in and the likelihood that VAT and the end of the Net Book Agreement are on the way. We can no longer assume that book sales will continue to subsidise the club as in the past. We also have to think hard whether to remain in a valuable building with high maintenance costs and planning restrictions in central Edinburgh or, in conjunction with FIBOT, move to more utilitarian premises and invest the money saved for both our futures. If we do make these sort of changes we shall need help from members, especially those with professional or business skills. We could also do with a new editor for this magazine! All this will be discussed at Council and the AGM so if you have a contribution please put it forward.

Management Committee

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Mike Ashley

Restructuring

The 1989 Conference was back in the Marine Hotel, North Berwick and fully booked by members keen to hear about Scottish raptors and enjoy all the social activites associated with SOC weekends. There was a strong feeling of continuity with the Major hovering around the organiser's desk and speakers like Donald Watson and Ian Newton holding the audience's attention. To the casual visitor the only discordant note was Frank Hamilton's waistcoat. But 1989 was also a watershed conference when a consultation process was started which could see the Club move out of Regent Terrace following the sale of the Bird Bookshop.

The background to all this is in the Annual Report sent to members with this issue. At last year's AGM we reported that the Bookshop had not made a profit. Sound management by Fiona Slack and increased sales, largely attributable to the BWP volume appearing, mean that we are able to report a profit of nearly £4,000 for 1988-89. This spring the Treasurer forecast a profit of c.£1,000 for 1989-90 based on a levelling out in sales but as the year progressed even this began to look optimistic. Despite considerable investment of time by several office bearers, who investigated a range of options from increased advertising to links with other outlets, we were not in a position where we could guarantee that the Bookshop would produce a profit every year. This reflects the fact that the book trade is now very different to the situation in 1963 when we started selling books. Most large towns now have several big bookshops open at nights and weekends. Competitors now exist in the specialist market that we used to have to ourselves. Further changes, such as VAT and the end of the Net Book Agreement, are on the horizon. The SOC is a club and its office bearers cannot give the day to day attention that a modern business demands. Also further investment would soon have been essential to guarantee the Bookshop's future.

In August Council accepted Management Committee's advice that we should investigate selling the Bookshop. As this was a commercial decision it was not appropriate to consult the membership as a whole as this would have led to delays which could have been damaging to the prospects for a sale.

The sale came sooner than we anticipated; one of the contacts we approached for advice had just decided to expand into selling new as well as second hand books. The AGM accepted that Management Committee has secured the club as good a deal as we could reasonably hope for. All the stock was sold so we were not left with the less attractive books. In addition we were paid £7,500 for our mailing list and goodwill. This figure is based on one year's notional profit which is above what the bookshop was actually making. The quick sale avoided a damaging period of uncertainty which could have lead to deterioration in the bookshop's reputation making it much harder to sell. Under its new owners the Bookshop will continue to provide a service at the Conference. The bookshop computer that never sold a book was not included and we can now convert it to give us a proper membership computer.

Esther Williamson, widow of Fair Isle Bird Observatory's frist Warden, cuts the cake at the party held on 26 August to celebrate FIBOT's 41st birthday and completion of the redevelopment work on the building. Others in the picture are: Nick & Elizabeth Riddiford, Elizabeth & Paul Harvey, Marina & Roy Dennis and David MacLehose, Chairman of FIBOT. Photo: David Wheeler.

St. Ann's Books wanted to take over quickly to be ready for the Xmas trade so they could start recouping their investment. Chris and Christine Johnson are a husband and wife team operating from their own home with fewer overheads and staff but more expertise than us. They will process outstanding orders and we will forward any orders that come to Regent Terrace so no-one need worry if they have an order in the system.

There is no doubt that the Bookshop has supported the Club in the past but we are sure we have done the right thing in selling now. The interest from the sale should bring in up to £2000 a year without the hassle of running a business. The Club's cash flow is much healthier but our long term finances need attention. We need to generate extra income unless members are prepared to run the Club without staff.

Obviously this takes us to the building. 21 Regent Terrace was bought by an anonymous benefactor to act as a Scottish Centre for Ornithology. That it certainly did. The Scottish Wildlife Trust and RSPB Scottish Office were based there in their early days. FIBOT and SOC still are but is remaining in a building now valued at over £300,000 really the best way to fulfill the spirit of the original gift? The building is expensive to maintain, only has planning permission for office use on two of its four floors and cannot hold meetings bigger than committees or small discussion groups; most Lothian Branch meetings take place elsewhere. Some members do have a strong attachment to No.21 but others have queried its costs over the years. At least we know that its value has outstripped the cost of the repairs we have done.

The feeling of the AGM was that we should investigate disposing of the building as outlined in Option 2 of the Annual Report and move to more modest accommodation with at most 1.5 staff. To do so we must negotiate with FIBOT. We must also consider the Waterston Library. As the finest ornithological library north of Oxford we have a duty to maintain it, especially the long runs of journals obtained as exchanges for Scottish Birds. Whether the library should move with the Club offices or whether it might be better to go to a bigger institution, where it would be available at evenings and weekends, was the subject of strongly divergent opinions.

The future of the Library is one of the issues Council will have to decide. By the time you read this we shall have started talking to FIBOT but we shall not take irrevocable decisions until every member has had a chance to read this and the options in the report. If you have views make them known. The only thing we ask is that you link your proposals with reality; they must reflect our resources and by resources we mean people as well as money.

Stan da Prato
President

The address of St Ann's Books is ***Rectory House, 26 Priory Road, Great Malvern, Worcs., WR14 3DR.***

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North Ronaldsay developments

A year ago (*SBN 12, Dec. 1988*) we featured Scotland's newest bird observatory. Since then progress has been made on several fronts. Grant aid from the Orkney Islands Council and Highlands and Islands Development Board has allowed work to start on converting the old croft which housed the original dormitory into a two storey building incorporating a Ringing Laboratory, five smaller dormitories each with four beds, wardens' flat and extra storage space. This will provide higher standards of accommodation with more flexibility for smaller groups and families as well as better facilities for working with birds. A ground floor bedroom suitable for the disabled is planned. The new block will be built on similar lines to the existing observatory which features an energy efficient design utilising solar and wind power. It is hoped that an EEC grant will enable a second windmill to be constructed to provide all the observatory's power needs and expand Strathclyde University's studies on energy utilisation. If all goes to plan the new accommodation could be ready for autumn 1989.

The observatory has used the government's Employment Training Scheme to fund a Warden and Assistant Warden. Sensibly their training programmes are designed to allow progression to a variety of natural history careers and not just within the rather restricted field of observatry work. However bird recording and ringing are regarded as essential parts of their remits.

North Ronaldsay has been the leader in persuading other British observatories to computerise their data. Visitors soon become accustomed to watching their records appear on a TV screen in the observatory lounge as they go into the computer's memory. Fair Isle has also installed a computer and it is hoped that establishments south of the border follow the lead from the Northern Isles as analysis of mountains of hand written data has been one of the major constraints on utilising bird observatory data.

North Ronaldsay's success in attracting grant aid reflects the importance of the observatory to the economy of the island. The Loganair Islander plane now calls more frequently, often making several trips a day. The observatory's policy of buying provisions through the two local shops and employing local people to help with catering and cleaning and the money spent by visitors make NRBO the major source of tourist income to the island. As the most interesting migration often occurs well into the autumn, after other forms of tourism have usually ended, this is particularly useful. As a result relations with the islanders are excellent and birdwatchers are free to walk over croft land, provided they use their common sense and do not damage crops or upset livestock.

Rare migrants are not the be all and end all of a bird observatory but they do generate interest and encourage people to search through cover and, in the process, record the commoner species. North Ronaldsay's species list is approaching 300 and, even in an autumn like 1989 not noted for its easterly winds, new birds were recorded such as Blyth's Reed Warbler and Pechora Pipit. To many visitors the commoner birds are at least as interesting such as the 1000+ Snipe that inhabit the marshes and spill over onto fields and foreshore in autumn. There are also numbers of both Grey and Common Seals and passing cetaceans but, thankfully, no rats.

Comparisons with Fair Isle are inevitable. Despite their proximity the islands have different characters. Fair Isle has cliffs and moorland with nesting seabirds and an uncanny ability to attract rare migrants which are relatively easy to see due to the limited cover. North Ronaldsay is low lying and pastoral with marshes and beaches. To date it hasn't recorded an American passerine but it offers better seawatching opportunities and has more habitat for waders and wildfowl. Both islands excel in attracting continental passerines and both offer the visitor the chance to experience life at a pace long gone from most of mainland Britain. They are really complementary and birders and island goers should visit them both.

Accommodation at NRBO currently costs from £7.50 per day full board. Practical help in extending the building is welcome and there could be free board in return for work. Vacancies occasionally arise for Employment Training places for experienced birdwatchers, ideally with a ringing background, who meet the scheme's requirements. For details of any of these contact ***North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory, Orkney, KS17 2BE.***

Strong stuff from BTO

Readers of *BTO News* (Sept/Oct 1989) were surprised to learn that Observatory wardens winter in far off e*rotic* places. This makes it all the more surprising that they are said to be declining! We hope it was a misprint and not an attempt to increase the circulation of what we understand to be a publication suitable for family reading.

Lurcher's Gully

Highland Regional Council has inserted modified proposals for a ski development based on a shuttle bus service across the base of the Northern Corries of the Cairngorms into its structure plan. This requires the approval of the Secretary of State for Scotland who has been urged to stick to his previous decision not to allow ski developments away from the existing road by a wide range of conservation and mountaineering organisations.

Damage to SSSI's

Recent press reports claim that at least 22 SSSI's in Scotland have been damaged in the past year. The information seems to have originated as a leak from NCC's Peterborough HQ, according to *Scotland on Sunday*, which sees it as evidence of disillusion by NCC staff over the failure of NCC Scotland and the Scottish Office to safeguard important habitats. One of the sites is Caenlochan where damage was attributed to recreational vehicles; other sites include Spey Bay, the Rhinns of Islay and several sites in Galloway. NCC confirm that damage has occurred and point out that it is summarised in their annual reports. It should also be noted that SSSI's have also been damaged south of the border, with 206 affected in England and Wales.

Choughs on Islay *Steven Brown*

Progress on Islay

During the last year developments have taken place which should take the heat out of two conservation controversies. In May the NCC reached an agreement with United Malt and Grain Distillers that safeguards Duich Moss, the important roost for Greenland White-fronts. A grant of £270,000 from the Department of the Environment will be used to make the site a National Nature Reserve. Nearby Castlehill Moss has been bought from the Forestry Commission and will be used by the distillers as their source of peat. One wonders why this sensible compromise could not have been achieved years ago and why the distillers were previously so insistent that only Duich Moss peat was suitable. Whisky drinking birdwatchers may be interested to learn that one of the malts to which the peat contributes is Lagavulin, one of the most distinctive Islays and a particular favourite of the Editor. The malt whisky market is now buoyant and several Islay distilleries have increased or restarted production.

Elsewhere on the island money from NCC and DAFS has been given out to farmers to pay for scaring geese from their pastures. As around 35 farmers applied for a share of c. £40,000 the sum per farm was not large but seems to have gone some way to help – previously these farmers were not eligible for help as they did not farm on SSSI's. Scaring was not well co-ordinated between farms nor did the sum available generate extra employment. Those farmers where land is designated an SSSI did rather better as around £50,000 was paid out between eight farms. The RSPB's farm near Gruinart played an important role in holding many of the geese on its specially improved pastures. This farm and nearby SSSI's held around three quarters of the geese (which on Islay means 15,000 birds) until February when a storm affected the grass and led to a redistribution of geese on the island.

Only two licenses were issued by DAFS to farmers to shoot Greenland White-fronts; both were very late in the season and seem to have done little damage. Islay Estates continue to be licensed to shoot Barnacles on their land, which they claim is the best method of scaring and also brings income to the island as the shooting is done by visiting sport shooters. Since sport shooting presupposes birds available to be shot this seems a rather shaky argument.

For wildlife information on the island and low cost accommodation, especially suitable for groups, contact the ***Islay Natural History Trust at Port Charlotte (Tel. 049685 288).***

Progress on Shetland Sandeel Research

The problem of food shortage for Shetland's breeding seabirds has received widespread publicity this year, especially once it became clear that for the main species involved (Arctic and Great Skua, Kittiwake, Arctic Tern and Puffin) the 1989 breeding season was little better than the disastrous one of 1988. However, it is heartening to be able to report some good news amidst the gloom.

There has been a great need for a programme of integrated research into the problem, looking not only at how far breeding seabirds forage, how deep they dive and what they catch but also what prey is available to them, at what depth and for what periods. In July, Glasgow University was awarded substantial funding from the Natural Environment Research Council to carry out the seabirds aspects of this research. After a worrying period when it looked as though there would be no funding for the complementary work on sandeels, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) stepped in with a programme of research into sandeel biology which will hopefully be funded by a combination of government sources, conservation organisations and commercial sponsorship. Until now, DAFS' remit has meant that their surveys have mainly studied sandeels in relation to the requirements of the fishing industry. That they will now be studying the biology of sandeels in relation to the requirements of seabirds is a welcome move and should go a long way towards clearing the muddied waters of the "sandeel problem".

Puffin

However, DAFS have yet to make the difficult decision over what form and scale the 1990 sandeel fishery should take. This summer they announced the first every statutory control over the fishery, in the form of its closure from 1st July each year. For the first half of each year (effectively a fishing season of late March to the end of June), the fishery will operate under a licensing arrangement and it is the details of this scheme which are awaited. Despite considerable pressure from conservation organisations and concerned individuals, as well as their own admission that "the stock can at present support a fishery only at a low level" and is "expected to decline further", DAFS considered that stopping the fishery altogether would be "difficult to justify because the stocks are *estimated* still to be above the level below which it is *thought* that recruitment *might* be impaired" (my italics). This is hardly "a policy of caution and of taking no risks" which Jim Wallace MP called for back in May, at the height of the debate over the fishery's future. In view of the current state of North Sea Haddock stocks, and the furore over quotas, there may well be renewed interest in sandeels by local skippers in 1990; if they can find them in commercial quantities. While understanding the dilemma facing the fishing industry, surely it would be better to close the sandeel fishery for the time being, at least until such time as stocks recover (and seabirds are breeding normally again).

Shetland still has large numbers of breeding seabirds, although even a casual visitor who has known the islands before will be aware of the lack of terns. However, repeated breeding failure can only have one outcome and that is population decline. We should also remember that species which cannot replace the losses of adult mortality become extremely vulnerable to the impact of oil pollution and the long-term effects of a large oil spill in Shetland now would be much greater than in the 1970's.

Martin Heubeck, Shetland Bird Club

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

Gardyloo!

On 29th August 1989 after a pleasant surprise of breakfast on board, twelve adventurous souls set out from the Edinburgh Dock aboard *Gardyloo* over a grey but calm sea. The crew's task was to export an unusual, undesirable and unmentionable cargo from Leith to a location seven miles off Bell Rock; our aim was to search the wave tops for those unusual but highly desirable pelagic species not so readily found by twitching land-lubbers. Both missions were successfully accomplished but I will confine my story to our task!

Sailing past a Cormorant-festooned wreck off Inchkeith and heading towards the Isle of May our first exciting moment came when a Black Tern was spotted at some distance from the ship by one of our more eagle-eyed watchers. A few patient observers were rewarded when the bird reappeared at shorter range to hover and dive alongside. Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns were seen in greater numbers for comparison. Meanwhile the Manx Shearwater count was rising steadily. On the return journey a flock of 150 split in two on take-off as the ship ploughed relentlessly towards them. Our first Sooty Shearwater glided past to starboard and soon, to mounting excitement, another was crossing our bows, both at close enough range to see the characteristics of top view and underside. Half of the party had distant views of another four of the same species while the rest were down below having the complexities of the engine-room explained. Skuas were represented by eight Arctics and five Bonxies.

Small groups of adult and young Puffins dived to safety, likewise a few Razorbills but the most abundant auks were Guillemots, with young birds, already adult size, squeaking loudly to their attendant parents. One adult was even heard to growl in true breeding ledge fashion. Passing Gannets sported the full range of plumages.

A huge raft of Eider near Inchkeith was not unexpected and a few Mergansers flew past but the most surprising duck was a solitary Teal, far out at sea, flying west. Waders were few but Whimbrel was identified in flight over the water.

It was interesting to identify familiar landmarks such as North Berwick Law and Aberlady Bay from unfamiliar angles. The Warden of the latter's claim that he could see his socks on the washing line at home on the distant East lothian coast was treated with a pinch of sludge!

Captain Leask and his crew made us most welcome and comfortable and fed us well. If the crew members were bemused by twelve adult birdwatchers rushing from port to starboard and back again like excited school children, they were too polite to show it!

Adam Knox

Three SOC members, unable to go on this sailing, were kindly given places on the Edinburgh Natural History Society trip two days later. They saw similar species of birds but also enjoyed the spectacle of 25-30 Dolphins leaping out of the water. The Gardyloo, Lothian Regional Council's sludge boat, sails thrice weekly, carrying twelve passengers on a free trip, with meals provided. Their address is the Water & Drainage Department, LRC, 6 Cockburn Street, Edinburgh EH1 1NZ.

Birdfood standards

Due to an anomaly in the law there are no legal standards covering the Wild Bird food trade. There are fairly strict laws covering all human and animal food trades as well as the cage birdfood trade. Because of this the birdfood trade has become a dumping ground for sub-standard foods, particularly peanuts. Aflatoxins, which have been reported widely in the press during the last eighteen months, are causing major concern amongst many people, particularly the general public. Now something is being done about it. Unfortunately there is virtually no data on the effect of Aflatoxins in wild bird populations and it is unlikely that there ever will be though there is very good data on poultry.

Birdfoods Standards Association

This Association has just been formed. Its objectives are to 'clean up' the birdfood trade, by setting an Aflatoxin standard for peanuts which is safe for birds and bringing the Bird Food Trade inside the law. To ensure this initiative is a success it will need the majority of the bird food trade to participate, and to be backed by the major bird organisations. To date, something over 70% of the 'tonnage' firms are in favour. RSPB and BTO are in favour and SOC is happy to join them by recommending members to join the Peanut Watchdog Scheme. For this to be effective it needs to be monitored. If a member suspects that nuts he or she has purchased are not safe and carry the seal he should report the form selling the nuts to the Local Trading Standards office. The nuts will then be tested and if not of the desired quality the firm will be prosecuted.

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Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period July to September is covered here.*

The breeding season was generally a good one for most species. **Terns** in the Western Isles fared well, but in Shetland they had another disastrous breeding season and many other seabirds also reared few young due to a continuing scarcity of sandeels. Autumn migration was affected by the scarcity of easterly winds, with no large falls of migrants reported. Despite this there was a scattering of rare species including a **Great Knot** in Shetland, which, if accepted, will be the first British record.

A **White-billed Diver** was off Harris in August. The **Red-necked Grebe** flock off Gosford reached a record count of 58 in late August and a **Black-necked Grebe** was at Hule Moss in early September. Seawatching in Grampian produced 2 **Cory's** and a **Great Shearwater**, whilst another **Great** was off the Butt of Lewis. However **Sooty Shearwaters** were fairly scarce, the exception being 200 per hour off North Ronaldsay on 19 August. **Manx Shearwaters** were seen in large numbers off several sites, particularly in the Forth and off Ayrshire, with the highest count 6,000 between Prestwick and Irvine on 27 August. A **Balearic Shearwater** was seen off Troon several times in August and September. A huge count of 2,000 **Storm Petrels** was made in an hour off Sumburgh on 11 August. Several **Leach's Petrels** were noted but a trip to catch them at the small Foula breeding colony in August failed to find any.

A **Night Heron** was noted in Orkney. Six **Barnacle Geese** at Troon on 14 July were early, and small numbers of **Brent Geese** were seen here and there. There was a good passage of **Wigeon**. Single male **American Wigeon** in eclipse plumage were picked out at Montrose, Cotehill Loch and in Orkney, while a **Garganey** was noted at Gladhouse, with 2 more at Lochgelly. Female **King Eiders** were off Sumburgh and Aberdeen, with males off Fair Isle and Murcar. A pair of **Surf Scoters** visited Lerwick, with another drake in Spey Bay. A few early sightings of **Long-tailed Ducks** included a summering bird at Gullane. **Ruddy Ducks** bred at Kilconquhar Loch, rearing 6 young, whilst 4 were seen at Lochgelly and singles at Gladhouse and Hule Moss.

Unusual raptors during the period included 3 **Honey Buzzards** on North Ronaldsay, another elsewhere in Orkney, single **Red Kites** in Orkney, Perthshire and Fife, (the Orkney record involved one of the re-introduced birds which later returned to its release site), a **Sea Eagle** in Harris, **Marsh Harriers** on North Ronaldsay, at Strathbeg, with 2 others in Fife, a **Rough-legged Buzzard** which summered in Shetland, an **Osprey** at Gladhouse and **Hobbies** in Caithness and East Lothian.

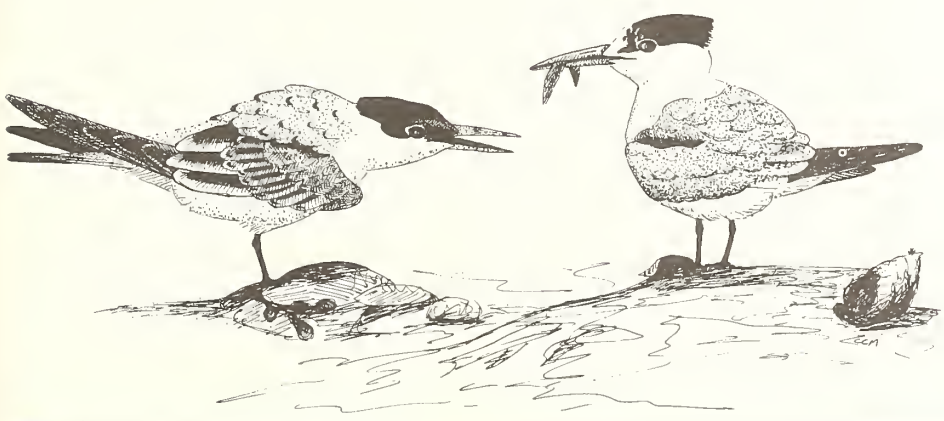
American Golden Plovers were on Unst and at Dundonald, whilst a **Little Ringed Plover** appeared in Shetland. Britain's first **Great Knot** (a fine adult in summer plumage), spent just one afternoon at Sumburgh on 15 September to the dismay of several twitchers who missed it the following day. It was a very poor autumn for **Little Stints.** A **Temminck's Stint** was near Inverness and a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at Barassie, with another in the Inner Hebrides. A **Baird's Sandpiper** on Unst may have been the same one which visited Virkie the following day. **Pectoral Sandpipers** were on Whalsay and North Ronaldsay, with 2 at the Loch of Banks in Orkney. It was also a very poor year for **Curlew Sandpipers**. Single **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were on the Ythan, at Aberlady and at Barassie. **Ruff** were also scarce, the highest count being 35 at Strathbeg. An exceptionally early **Jack Snipe** was at Ellenford on 16 July. There were widespread reports of **Black-tailed Godwits**. Grampian had above average numbers of **Spotted Redshank** but numbers elsewhere were unexceptional. Single **Lesser Yellowlegs** were at Tain and Irvine. Both **Green** and **Wood Sandpipers** were scarce.

Red-necked Phalaropes dispersed early after a poor breeding season and resulted in several records away from breeding areas from Orkney to Musselburgh. It was a good autumn for **Grey Phalaropes.**

Skua passage was poor compared with recent years. The south-east coast did best with 27 **Pomarines** off Hound Point on 24 August. **Long-tailed Skuas** were reported off Orkney and from Grampian.

It was a good autumn for unusual gulls, with 2 records of **Mediterranean Gull** in the Lothians, a **Laughing Gull** in Lerwick, **Little Gulls** reported from Shetland to the Borders, single **Sabine's Gulls** in Lerwick, off Papa Westray and Ayrshire on 3 occasions.

A **Lesser Crested Tern** together with its hybrid offspring visited Musselburgh and Aberlady en route from the Farnes to winter quarters. **Roseate Terns** visited Port Edgar and Aberlady, whilst several **Little Auks** were seen in Scapa Flow on the unusual date of 3 September.



Lesser Crested Tern and hybrid offspring *Chris McGuigan*

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

Numbers of migrant **Warblers** were poor, but included **Lanceolated, Booted** and **Aquatic** Warblers on Fair Isle, a **Marsh Warbler** at Sumburgh, and 2 **Icterine Warblers** in Shetland. Orkney and at Fife Ness, **Subalpine Warblers** on Out Skerries and at Durness and a scatter of **Barred Warblers. An Arctic Warbler** was on Unst on 12 September. **Yellow-browed Warblers** were very scarce and the largest fall of **Willow Warblers** was 50 on Fair Isle on 10 September.

The rarest bird on Fair Isle during the period was a **Coal Tit,** the first record since 1965! A **Golden Oriole** was seen at Crail, **Red-backed Shrikes** were very scarce, but a **Rose-coloured Starling** made a colourful sight at Durness.

Four **Common Crossbills** at Crosswood were the only ones reported. The number of **Scarlet Rosefinches** was surprisingly high and included at least 10 in Shetland, about 12 on Fair Isle (including a red male), several in Orkney (also including a red male) and a female at Fife Ness. **Lapland Buntings** were confined to Shetland. The only **Ortolan Bunting** was reported on Fair Isle where there were at least 5 **Little Buntings,** with 2 on Unst and singles on North Ronaldsay and Stronsay. Fair Isle had a monopoly of **Yellow-breasted Buntings,** with at least 3 individuals, but the only **Black-headed Bunting** of the period was seen in Orkney.

STOP PRESS

October brought ***Pechora Pipits*** *to Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay, a* ***Pied Wheatear*** *to Fair Isle and a* ***Blyth's Reed Warbler*** *to North Ronaldsay. An illusive, strange* ***snipe*** *seen on Fair Isle may have been a* ***Swinhoe's Snipe,*** *but its identification is still being pursued.*

Pete Ellis

Owls at Edinburgh

Owls fascinate people. Even people who have never seen a live owl in the wild seem to like them judging by the number of times owls appear as ornaments or artwork. Owls also attract scientific attention and it was no surprise that the International Owl Conference hosted by Edinburgh University's Department of Forestry and Natural Resources in its centenary year, and jointly organised with the Nature Conservancy Council and British Trust for Ornithology, attracted over 100 participants from several European countries.

Why study Owls?

To the enthusiast the answer is self evident; owls are interesting birds. There are other reasons. Like diurnal raptors owls are at the top of food chains and therefore of interest as indicators of the state of the habitat over which they hunt. As this habitat is usually either farmland or forest this is of interest to people concerned about environmental changes such as those that have radically altered European farming methods since World War Two. Some owl species, such as the Barn Owl in Britain or the Little Owl in Europe, have suffered marked declines and this has led to demands for their conservation. Effective conservation presupposes knowledge of the key factors in the birds' lives which means ecological and other studies, ideally over long periods of time, since owls tend to be long lived birds.

Owls and their food

Most owls in northern Europe rely on small mammals for the bulk of their food and small mammal populations are well known for their habit of expanding and then crashing. These cycles are particularly striking in northern and upland areas of Europe where vole and lemming plagues are often linked to high numbers of predators. Long term studies in Fenno-Scandia have led workers like Erki Korpimaki to classify predatory birds into two main groups with some intermediates. One group includes the generalists such as Tawny, Ural and Eagle Owls and the Common Buzzard. These are all relatively large bodied birds that exploit a variety of prey species. Typically they are long lived, sedentary, site and mate faithful and strongly territorial.

By contrast birds such as Long and Short-eared, Snowy, Great Grey and Hawk Owls specialize on a narrow range of prey and are adapted to fluctuations in the numbers of their prey animals. They tend to be smaller bodied birds that, on average, live shorter lives during which they wander over what can be very large distances indeed. Short-eared Owls colour marked in the breeding season in southern Scotland by Andy Village were found in later summers as far apart as Orkney and Spain. These more nomadic species are often polygamous.

Several species are intermediate in their behaviour. For example Tengmalm's Owl behaves as a specialist in Fenno-Scandia but a sedentary generalist in Central Europe. The Kestrel may also be in this category.

Although the more nomadic owls response to small mammal cycles is more obvious the sedentary species are also affected. For example Hannu Pietiainen's studies of breeding Ural Owls in Finland show that the breeding success of pairs varies dramatically according to the number of small mammals. In good years more Ural Owls breed and their laying dates are earlier. This is important as early clutches have more eggs and produce more young.

In Scandinavia snow depth and the duration of snow cover seem to be the most important factors affecting the availability of small mammals to owls.

Female Barn Owl carrying shrew to its nest in the roof of a building near Langholm, Dumfriesshire. This fine shot was taken by Bobby Smith on a Hasselblad camera fitted with an 80 mm. lens and electronic flash at a shutter speed of one five hundredth of a second. The ability to set shutter speeds to synchronise with flash is an advantage medium format cameras have over the 35 mm. models most phographers use nowadays. This picture won first prize in the 1989 Club Photo Competition. The Dumfries Branch did exceptionally well as second and third also went to their area; we hope to show them in a later issue.

Owls in conifer plantations

Even if some conservationists do not like exotic conifers in the British uplands some owls do. The reduction in grazing when sheep walk is fenced and planted leads to a dramatic increase in small mammals, especially the Short-tailed vole (known to the initiated as STV's or Microtus, an ''in'' word that readily separates the owl expert from the rest of the human race).

Steve Petty has studied Tawny Owls in Kielder Forest, one of our biggest plantations. Natural nest sites are in short supply and Tawnies readily use boxes. This makes studying them easier but it is doubtful if nest sites are a limiting factor, since the birds readily use sites on crags or even the ground. The scarcity of mammalian predators compared to other habitats may be significant. Tawny Owls will abandon natural sites in favour of boxes but do not seem to occur at higher densities when boxes are provided. Some pairs will use more than one box over a period of years. Owl density seems to be linked to the number of clear felled areas over which they can hunt. Steve repeated the theme of this conference that owl numbers are largely determined by small mammal populations.

Comparing Kielder Tawny Owls with Tawny and Ural Owls in Finland suggests that snow cover and ground predators are more important in Finland. Even these ''generalist'' species are more mobile and less faithful to sites and mates in Finland, according to Perti Saurola of the Finnish Ringing Scheme. Perti enlivened the conference with his illustrations of his researchers dripping with blood from Ural Owl attacks. Some Ural Owls may not breed until ten though one year olds may try in very good vole years.

While studying Kestrels Andy Village also looked at the two ''eared'' owls in Eskdalemuir, Scotland. All three species were largely dependent on Short-tailed Voles and their numbers fluctuated in parallel with the rodents. As the conifers grew taller Kestrel and ''eared'' owl numbers dropped but Tawny Owls began to colonise.

Conserving British Barn Owls

Barn Owls are popular but, with widespread reports of declines, considerable efforts are being put into their conservation. Many of these efforts rely on the provision of nest boxes or reintroductions based on captive breeding programmes. Though based at Edinburgh, Iain Taylor and his colleagues have been studying Barn Owls in south west Scotland for some years, and are able to comment on what really matter to these owls. Nest boxes can be important but only where natural sites are scarce and the habitat supports enough small mammals for the owls to prey on. Reintroductions face the same problem: there is no point in going to the trouble and expense of breeding and releasing Barn Owls if the habitat is no longer suitable. In the more intensively farmed parts of Britain this is often the case. Even breeding in the wild by released birds is not conclusive proof of success unless it is maintained and enough young reared to compensate for adult mortality. As Barn Owls are long lived, populations already heading for extinction may not be thought of as in trouble unless their reproductive rate is known.

Barn Owls conform to the general rules of owl society. They breed earlier and more successfully in years when prey is abundant. This is most obvious on sheep farms and plantations, where Barn Owls have a less varied choice of prey, than on lowland farms. Iain could find no evidence for the Hawk Trust's idea that British Barn Owl numbers are affected by snow cover limiting rodent numbers. He pointed out that no fully satisfactory explanation of the causes of rodent cycles has yet been established.

In some situations nest box schemes are helpful, such as in Galloway where Andy Dowell and Geoff Shaw have encouraged Barn Owls to nest in ten gallon plastic barrels fixed to spruce trees.

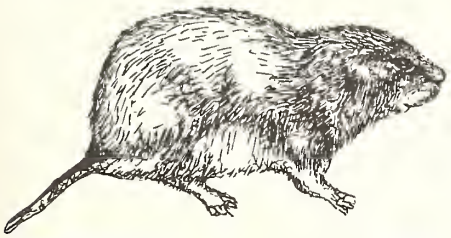
Long-tailed Field Mouse *David Ashley*

Barn Owls and rodenticides

In parts of Britain rats and mice are now resistant to Warfarin, for long the standard way of controlling these animals. Newer poisons have been developed but are suspected as a factor in the decline of the Barn Owl. Ian Newton's team at ITE Monks Wood has started to look at the problem. Analysis of owls sent in by the public has revealed that c11% of the birds had low levels of at least one of the new compounds, even in areas where rodents are not yet Warfarin resistant. This may not be a representative figure as most of the birds were casualties found in open spaces such as roadsides. Owls dying from poisoning might be more likely to do so in cover where their bodies would be missed.

Experiments with captive bred birds indicate that one chemical, Brodifacoum, is far more likely to kill owls than the others. It is already fairly strictly controlled and should only be used under licence inside buildings. However owls take rodents in and around buildings and poisoned mice do not die for several days, during which time they behave normally until a few hours prior to death.

Captive Barn Owls that did die from Brodifacoum had slightly higher levels in their bodies than dead wild birds. This could be due to chemicals decomposing over time and work is in hand on this. There is no strong evidence so far that the new rodenticides are a serious threat to wild owls, but there is a strong case for using the less toxic compounds and sticking to Warfarin where it is still effective.



Short-tailed Vole *David Ashley*

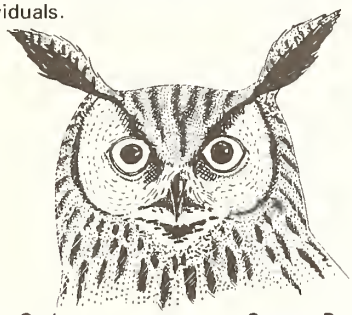
Seeing Owls in Scotland

Of the six owls occurring regularly in Scotland, the Tawny is undoubtedly the one most familiar to members, at least by its calls – a harsh 'kewick' and a resonant, wavering 'to-whoo'. Found in woods or even very small clumps of trees, it is widespread over most of the country except for Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. It is not uncommon in town parks. Short-eared Owls are the most likely to be seen hunting by day, when they quarter open moorland on long wings. The early stages of afforestation are often particularly suitable for them. In winter, many move to lower ground where they are joined by continental immigrants. Long-eared Owl is very similar in appearance but is almost exclusively nocturnal, roosting by day in dense scrub or conifer plantations, often using tiny shelter belts where its attenuated form, parallel to the main trunk, can be very difficult to see. The deep 'hoo' calls of adults and the youngsters' food-begging calls, which resemble swinging squeaky gates, are often clues to their otherwise unexpected presence. Long-eared Owls are commoner than many birdwatchers realise. Migrants often occur in daylight on the coast in late autumn. Tell them from Short-eared by their broader wings, less distinct and more rufous body plumage and the lack of a white trailing edge to their wings. Barn Owls are near the edge of their range here and it is not surprising that the best numbers are found in the milder south west although they do occur elsewhere. In the disused buildings, hollow trees and caves in which they nest they are easily disturbed but they can often be seen hunting on winter's afternoons. British birds are cream above and white beneath, giving them a ghostly appearance but remember that any owl will look white when caught in car headlights! The breeding range of Little Owls only just extends into Scotland. They roost in open trees and on cliffs, beneath which their distinctive pellets, full of beetle wing-cases, can often be found. Little Owls are mainly nocturnal but also hunt in late afternoon over rough grassland. Snowy Owls only just qualify as Scottish breeders, on the strength of nesting attempts in Shetland during 1967-75. Huge and white, with black markings in the case of females and immatures, these daylight hunters are also seen occasionally on our mountain-tops, a habitat similar to that of their Arctic homeland.

Peter R Gordon

Owl genetics

Karl Radler presented data on Eagle Owls that were reintroduced to several parts of West Germany. These birds were often bred from parents that had been picked up as casualties. This was not ideal as the genetic variation in many pairs was limited and it was possible that some released birds were unlikely to do well in the wild. Considerable discussion followed his suggestion that reintroductions should incorporate as wide a genetic base as possible as this runs counter to conventional conservation thinking which seeks to use local sources, even when these are down to a few individuals.



Eagle Owl *Steven Brown*

Owls and the future

Most speakers pointed to a diverse habitat as the key to keeping viable populations of owls and other wildlife on our farms and forests. Few species do well in intensive monocultures and "rough" areas are essential to maintain adequate numbers of the animals on which owls feed. Some of the information needed to conserve owls can only come from intensive studies but there is scope for amateur involvement through bodies like the BTO. Steve Percival, just finishing as the Owl Man of Beech Grove, stressed how much more useful information from ringers and nest recorders would be if people did follow up visits and took simple measurements.

Readers finding dead Barn Owls should send them to the ***Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon PE17 2LS.*** *If owls or other birds seem to have been poisoned by agricultural chemicals they should contact* ***Douglas Ruthven, DAFS, East Craigs on 031-339 2555.***

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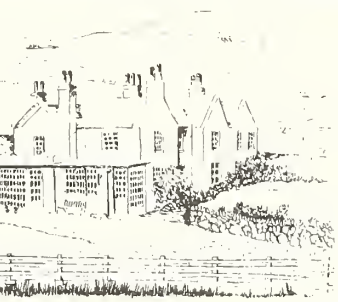

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
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On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £10 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Soggy Summer for Whitefronts

Greenland White-fronted Geese are one of Scotland's better known winter visitors. In an attempt to understand more about the mysterious summer lives of these scarce geese, a Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust/Greenland White-fronted Goose Study expedition set off last summer to Greenland. David Stroud and Tony Fox report .....

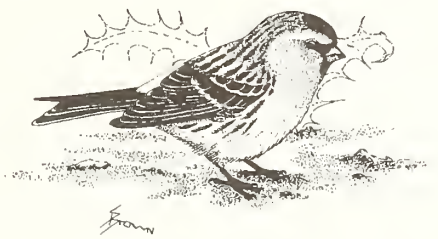
As we huddled under up-turned inflatable boats together with several Greenland White-fronted Geese which we were ringing, the heavens opened with a torrential downpour. In the Arctic, perhaps 'raining cats and dogs' should be 'raining Musk Ox and Caribou' – it certainly felt like it! Both the geese and ourselves wondered what was happening – was this the same west Greenland that is hot, dry and dusty for months on end? Alas, the high pressure that gave most of Britain and Europe such a hot summer deflected the normally wet Atlantic depressions destined for Scotland further north into the Arctic this year. The result was one of the wettest summers on record for Greenland. Such weather came as a surprise for us as we followed up work which started near Sondre Stromfjord in 1988.

Last summer we established that there were significant numbers of geese near this airbase which is the main entry point into west Greenland from Europe. This made a trip to catch and ring geese in this area far easier than previous Greenland White-fronted Goose Study expeditions in 1979 and 1984 to an area called Eqalummiut nunaat. This work had necessitated extremely expensive helicopter charter to take us further north. With an international party from Ireland, Wales, England, Scotland and Denmark, with the encouragement of the Greenland Home Rule Authorities, and with funding from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, we set out in early July. After about 150 miles of back-packing we had caught 32 Greenland White-fronts during their flightless moult period. The catch would have been greater but for the fact that many of the non-breeding birds were well-advanced with their wing-moult by the time we were able to start catching. We ringed geese with both white leg rings and orange neck collars (both reading up and with a digit-letter-letter code as used on some 700 geese caught in winter at Wexford Slobs, Ireland). These neck-collared geese should be much more conspicuous to observers than previously marked White-fronts which just had white leg-rings.

Canadas colonise

As well as ringing geese, a census was undertaken of c500 sq km of rolling, hilly tundra. Within this area we found 215 geese including five families, a total confirmed later by aerial census. Of particular interest were three families of Canada Geese, confirming observations of a family in a small flock seen by us in the same area in 1988. These were the first breeding records for this part of Greenland, and with the well known ability of this species to colonise new areas, they may indicate the start of a future population expansion. It is to be hoped that if this does occur there will be no competition with the smaller White-fronts.

The geese share this gently rolling verdant landscape, studded with lakes and marshes, with Great Northern and Red-throated Divers. These wetlands support vast numbers of mosquitoes, midges and blackfly. These are very uncomfortable for human summer visitors but they are the staple diet of Greenland Mallard, Long-tailed Ducks and Red-necked Phalaropes. We were able to census these species during our goose counts and also had time to catch modest numbers of passerines, particularly Redpolls and Lapland Buntings, which are abundant in the lowland dwarf willow scrub. In more rocky areas, Snow Buntings and Greenland Wheatears are common and Ravens are frequent, although the latter is most common around the Air Base rubbish dump which also attracts Arctic Foxes. The passerines, together with the Arctic Hare and Ptarmigan, are prey species for Gyrfalcons and Peregrines, both of which nest on steep cliffs. Our study plot is also an important Caribou calving area and, despite a profusion of grisly carcasses scattered throughout, the consequence of a particularly severe winter in 1988/89, we saw many mothers with healthy calves enjoying the first brief, warm (and wet!) few months of their lives.



Arctic Redpoll *Steven Brown*

Conservation

In recent years, the Greenland Home Rule Authorities have taken a very positive attitude to the conservation of natural resources, and several very large Ramsar sites have been declared. Some of these are of major importance for Greenland White-fronts. The protection of these areas is a major contribution to the conservation of both the geese and the many other breeding waterfowl occurring within them.

Aside from ringing, our other objective was to carry out an aerial survey of two of the most important Ramsar sites, declared because of their known importance for Greenland White-fronts. This we did to good effect, using a specially adapted observer aircraft used at other times for carrying out whale surveys off the Greenland coast. From pilot work done in 1988 (*BTO News* 160: 6-7), we knew that census of flightless geese from the air is possible and we were delighted to find very high numbers of geese in the two areas overflown this summer.

It was significant that we were working within one such Ramsar site, catching geese that may winter in other such sites in Scotland (eg Claish Moss, Endrick Mouth, Loch Lomond, Duich Moss and Feur Lochain on Islay), Wales (Dyfi Estuary) or in Ireland (Wexford Slobs). This brings home the need for international perspectives in the conservation of migratory birds and the value of networks of sites such as Ramsar sites or Special Protection Areas (*SBN* 14: 1-2). When birds travel great distances or are very thinly spread over large areas, there is a need to be able to make and coordinate conservation decisions on a wide scale. Clearly migratory geese need protection at all stages of their annual cycle and it is to be hoped that Iceland (where the geese stop in spring and autumn) will soon protect some of their very important wetlands under ever increasing loss because of drainage and agricultural ''improvement''.

Work in Britain

Thorough searches for neck-collared geese will be made on Islay this winter during the NCC/GWGS goose census in November, as well as at other wintering sites in Britain and Ireland. Sightings of these geese, as well as those previously ringed in Greenland and at the Wexford Slobs will enlarge our understanding of the population dynamics of those scarce geese as well as giving valuable information on site use which can then be used for practical conservation purposes. Any sightings of colour ringed geese or counts of wintering flocks of Greenland White-fronted Geese at any time of the winter will be gratefully received and acknowledged, and should be sent to: **David A Stroud, Greenland White-fronted Goose Study, 5 Parkway, Nassington, Peterborough PE8 6QE.**

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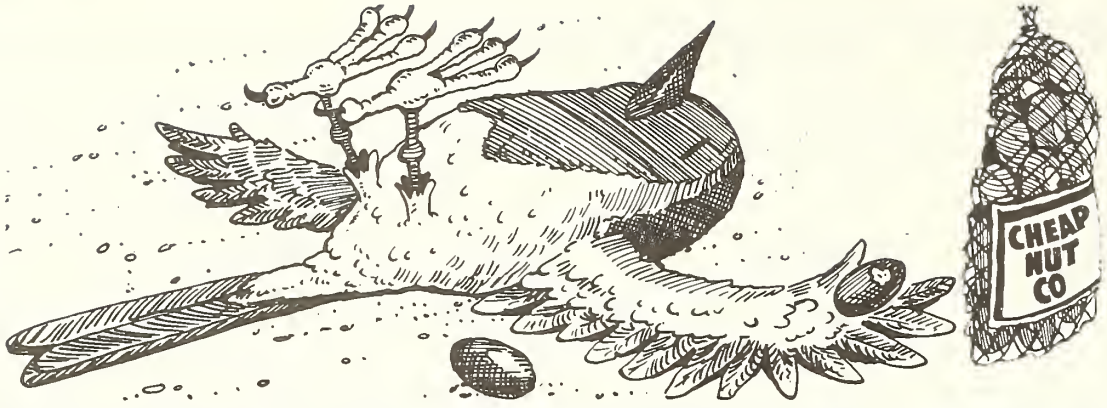

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Reviews

Where to watch birds in Scotland *by Mike Madders & Julie Welstead; Christopher Helm; 1989; 368pp, 48 maps, 70 line drawings; £10.95.*

This is the most comprehensive guide to birdwatching sites in Scotland yet published. It is more realistic about the birds you are likely to see than some other guides. In general it is accurate, probably because the authors have consulted so widely. It is not free from faults and the following are meant as constructive criticisms for a later edition. Some of the main sites seem to be of dubious value and included because organisations like the National Trust or local authorities encourage public access to them. That would not matter if some better sites – Bass Rock and Rhum are two examples – were not relegated to an additional site category with minimal information. This is printed in excessively small type at the end of each Regional Section. The book's layout could be greatly improved if the many blank half pages were eliminated. Maps need more thought; what is the point of a sketch map for an area like Lochnagar where an OS is essential, yet no map for the Loch of Strathbeg? Several areas could do with better coverage notably the Flow Country. Proof reading is not bad but could do with a further check to eliminate the amusing Great *Spooted* Woodpecker on p.117 and more serious inaccuracies such as North Ronaldsay which is on p.280 in the book but p.230 in the Index.

This book is good value and we are happy to recommend it.

Pete Gordon & Stan da Prato

Birds of North Rona and Sula Sgeir; *by Stuart Benn, Stuart Murray & Mark Tasker of the Seabirds at Sea Team; NCC, Peterborough; 1989; 45 pp, b & w photos; £5.00 post free.*

These remote islands off northwest Scotland were declared a National Nature Reserve in 1956 primarily because of the Grey Seal rookery on North Rona, then the largest in the world (since superseded by the Monach Islands off North Uist). This is an attractively produced book describing the human as well as the ornithological history of the islands, and assessing the importance of the waters around the islands for seabirds throughout the year. The photographs of the islands are a welcome feature. I would have preferred more of them at the expense of some of the 'standard' photographs of seabirds.

William Harper

Eagles *by John Love; Whittet Books; 1989; 128 pp. many b+w dwgs in text; £6.95.*

An easy, entertaining and informative read about eagles which concentrates on Golden and White-tailed Eagles in Scotland. It is enlivened by a variety of drawings and cartoons by the author. This would make an excellent present for a youngster or beginner. It is unfortunate that it is printed on rather rough paper and is somewhat over-priced.

Mike Ashley

Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland *by J.N. Dymond, P.A. Fraser and S.J.M. Gantlett; T. and A.D. Poyser; 1989; 366 pp, many drawings and maps.; £19.00.*

This book unifies and updates two earlier works on scarce and rare birds, adding more than 80 species to the total. It analyses about 46,000 records of 306 species each illustrated by a line drawing. About half the illustrations are repeated from the earlier works which many prospective purchasers will already own. For extreme rarities all records are listed but for most species the period covered is 1958-85. Histograms show weekly and seasonal occurrences and maps illustrate distribution in spring and autumn. The old counties are used for several reasons, including continuity, but a map key is provided to assist readers not familiar with local government structure before 1975. The keen twitcher can tell at a glance the best places and times for his most wanted species, eg Fair Isle in late September for Pechora Pipit and Scilly in October for many American passerines, but we knew that anyway didn't we? It is suggested that the data can point to changes in the status of birds in their breeding areas but I have reservations about the extent to which extralimital records can be used for this purpose. In my view most people watch and record rare birds simply for pleasure.

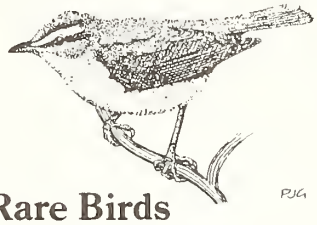
With the volume of data, mistakes are inevitable. A sample check of 30 species in Lothian revealed fine mapping errors, eg Ring-billed Gull has not occurred in East Lothian in spring but is so mapped, Forster's Tern is mapped for East Lothian although the text correctly states Midlothian and Brunnich's Guillemot is mapped for West Lothian when it should be East Lothian. Nevertheless the book is a mine of information, essential reading for rare bird enthusiasts and heaven for the statistically-minded twitcher.

Alan Brown

Fair Isle: *an Island Saga; by Valerie Thom; John Donald 1989; 147pp.; 15 col and many b & w photos and maps; £12.95.*

For years George and Irene Waterston collected material on Fair Isle with the eventual aim of producing a book. Their many other commitments meant that only a book of photographs was produced. Valerie Thom has now written the history of Fair Isle that I am sure the Waterstons would approve of. The story runs from prehistoric times to the present. There are now around 70 people resident on the island with a higher standard of living and wider outlook and opportunities than in the past, however picturesque that may look in the many old photographs that are a feature of this book. Much of Fair Isle's current success is due to George Waterston's initiative and the book describes how the bird observatory has brought publicity, visitors and investment to Fair Isle. Birds are, of course, mentioned but this book is really about the human inhabitants rather than the natural history. It is well produced on good quality paper though a few of the recent photographs could have been better, and some, such as the White-crowned Sparrow on p.115, have been badly cropped. The price may seem on the high side at 9p per page but the book is undoubtedly an excellent account of the human side of an island that every birdwatcher wants to visit.

Stan da Prato



Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland

by J. N. Dymond, P. A. Fraser and S. J. M. Gantlett

This book by a trio of rare-bird specialists is a successor to two earlier works (long out of print), *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1974) and *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1976). It unifies both of the earlier books and updates them, adding more than 80 species to the previous total.

The authors have analysed and considered some 45,000 records of scarce and rare birds in Britain and Ireland for the period 1958–85. Extreme rarities outside the period are also listed.

More than 300 species accounts are included, most of them accompanied by histograms of weekly and seasonal occurrences, with maps showing distribution by counties in spring and autumn or at particular times of year. For rarities with twelve or fewer occurrences during the period 1958–85, the place, date and other relevant information is given for each record.

Every species is illustrated by a line drawing, more than 150 of them commissioned for this book, the remainder being selected from the two earlier works.

Thanks to the expertise and diligence of the authors the reader has a complete picture for more than 300 species of rarities in these islands and can readily discover:

HOW MANY were seen
WHEN did they occur
HOW REGULARLY did they arrive
WHERE were they seen

24 x 16 cm, 368 pages, £19.00 net

Birds in Ireland

by Clive D. Hutchinson

The author, a leading Irish ornithologist, has compiled this comprehensive review of birds in the Republic and Northern Ireland.

(The book is a companion volume to Valerie Thom's *Birds in Scotland*).

26.5 x 19 cm, 212 pages, £19.00 net

T & A D POYSER

SOC Notices

SOC 200 Club Prizewinners

The winners in the recent series of draws, for which the first prize was £20 and the second £10, were:
July: Mrs Hisset, Ayr and Mrs Tulloch, Gigha;
August: D.L. Clugston, Paisley and R.S. Craig, Peebles;
September: P.J. Sellar, Surrey and D.C. Jardine, Hexham.

More members are still very welcome. Please write for details to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NL, or telephone Melrose 2176.**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Shetland Recorder

Nick Dymond has handed over to **D. Suddaby, 92 Sandvein, Lerwick, Shetland.**

Borders Recorder

From 15th September 1989 Ray Murray, the Local Recorder for Borders Region, will be living at a new address **4 Bellfield Crescent, Eddleston, Peebles, Borders EH45 8RQ Tel: 07213 677.**

Western Isles Recorders

The local recorder for the Uists, Benbecula and Barra is **T.J. Dix, 2 Dreumasdal, South Uist, PA81 5RT.** Peter Cunningham continues as recorder for Lewis and Harris.

Fife Indoor Meetings

These are in the Golf Hotel, St Andrews as usual except: 7th February when the venue is the Strathearn Hotel, Kirkcaldy.

Tayside March Meeting

Kate Thompson is unable to give her talk on 8th March. It is hoped that Ron Summers will fill that date on a similar topic.

Spring Conference

The joint SOC/BTO one day conference will be held at the Queens Hotel, Lockerbie on Saturday 10 March 1990. A Programme and Booking Form are enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

Lothian members help out

The local hospital that usually packs *SBN* and its enclosures into envelopes was unable to cope with the last issue. Peter Gordon organised local members Margaret Bell, Bryan Hickman, Stan Abel, Margaret Mowat and Mrs Livingston to ensure you received *SBN 15* on time. Thank you to all and also Bill Harper who temporarily stopped being the librarian in favour of filling piles of envelopes.

Atlas fieldwork

Please return any outstanding worksheets to your local organiser as soon as possible – we still need help with some remote areas in 1990. There may even be help with travel expenses! Full details from **Jim Reid at 21 Regent Terrace.**

Atlas in Lanark, Renfrew and Dunbarton

Iain Gibson is again the local organiser in this area. His address is **1 Rosebank Terrace, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire PA13 4EW.**

Scottish Bird Report 1988

This publication will be available in January from the SOC at £3.50.

Bird information phone lines

A commercial concern which gives twitchers details of rarities, mainly in SE England, is available for anyone willing to pay up to 38p per minute. Several SOC branches offer a more local, friendly and cheaper service to their members. Visitors who might wish to participate when in an unfamiliar area may not know the local contacts. If any branch wishes visitors to be able to ring up could they please send details to *SBN*? We stress that only birds that can be watched without risk of damage to them or the land they are on are publicised. We also remind potential users that the local contacts are doing this voluntarily, on their home telephones, and their generosity should not be overtaxed.

T. & A.D. Poyser

This husband and wife publishing team that has produced so many fine ornithological books over the past 17 years has decided to retire. The firm is now owned by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, best known for their Academic Press imprint. The sale only went through when the Poysers were satisfied their standards would be maintained by the new owners and Trevor is staying on for a further year as a consultant. The SOC has had a long association with Anna and Trevor and wishes them a long and happy retirement.

BOU Annual Conference

This will be held on 5-8 April 1990 at the University of Aberdeen Conference Centre on the theme Long-term Ecological Studies of Birds.

The work of the local research centres at Torry, Culterty and Hill of Brathens will figure in the programme, which will be enhanced by distinguished overseas speakers and will include a synthesis of long-term ecological studies on a range of bird types worldwide. There will also be field visits to local bird study areas in NE Scotland. The cost of the conference which includes overnight accommodation for three nights, all meals, lectures, field trips and conference fee will be in the region of £100/£120. There will be reductions for full-time students.

For full details contact **Mrs G. Bonham, British Ornithologists' Union, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 6AP.**

Local Bird Reports

To encourage the producation and sale of these we are always happy to publicise them through Small Ads free of charge. The only requirement is that the report has some sort of connection with the SOC.

Isle of May Trust

When the Nature Conservancy Council acquired the Isle of May from the Northern Lighthouse Board the change highlighted the need to formalise the status of the Observatory. In March this year the Isle of May Committee was reconstituted as a Charitable Trust, membership of which is open to all interested in the wellbeing of the Island and the Observatory. The hope is that with a broader base members will become involved to a greater extent. The Low Light lease, which is presently being finalised, has secured the future of the Observatory and an increased membership will enable the Trust to thrive. In the first instance there will be no charge for becoming a member but it is probable that once established a subscription would be payable entitling members to a copy of the Annual Report, Minutes of the A.G.M. and a Newsletter. Anyone interest in membership should write to the **Hon. Secretary, Ian M. Darling, West Acres, 579 Lanark Road West, Balerno, Edinburgh EH14 7BL.**

The 1988 Report is now available for £2 and the 1985-87 Report for £3 post free.

Migrating Shags

Every October we visit the Isleof May to look for colour-ringed seabirds. At this time of year many adult Shags return to, or near to, their nesting sites every evening to roost. They are joined at the southern end of the island by large numbers of first-winter Shags. Although it is well known that young Shags disperse in a southerly direction (Galbraith *et al. Ornis Scandinavica* 17: 68-74), we assumed that many of the birds we were seeing were reared locally, as the Isle of May fledges some 1,000-2,500 young each year. Also, we occasionally see adults feeding fledged juveniles in October. Our 1989 visit changed our views.

On 14 October we checked the roosting Shags and found eight first-winter individuals with red colour-rings which had two large white numbers or letters which could easily be read with a telescope. These were some of the 404 young colour-ringed in Caithness, 250 km to the north, last summer by Stuart MacKay. The following evening we saw four more red rings, and a single blue ring used in 1988. The subsequent three evenings each produced single colour-ringed birds, giving a total of 15 1989 young. About 800-1,000 first-winter Shags were present each night but, despite careful searching, we never saw the same bird on two nights. There was obviously a large passage of young Shags through the Isle of May during this time.

It would be worthwhile checking roosting Shags for colour-rings. Details of any seen please to **Stuart MacKay, Lynhurst, Gowrie Place, Wick, Caithness.**

Mike Harris, Sarah Wanless

Small Ads

ISLAY – Attractive holiday home in Port Charlotte with full facilities. Available to let from January. Sleeps 9-11 but smaller groups considered. For further details phone 031-336 3393.

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Birds

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

MARCH 1990 No. 17
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Mike Ashley
and Sheila Horsburgh

Last year of the Atlas

As we enter the final fieldwork season of the New Atlas there is some good news and some bad news in Scotland. First the bad news – we need a lot of help in certain areas to be assured of complete coverage after this year. The good news is that these areas are of outstanding scenic and ornithological appeal. The opportunity exists for all SOC members to enjoy the Scottish countryside at the same time as contributing to its conservation.

Coverage in 1989

Whilst achieving around two thirds coverage after two years the distribution of surveyed squares is, as expected, somewhat patchy. Virtually all 10km squares in the east of Scotland have been surveyed as well as those in Orkney and Caithness. Elsewhere much progress has been made in some difficult areas, thanks to favourable weather. The biggest problem area after the first year's fieldwork was probably west Inverness with a mere 14% of the squares surveyed. There seemed little hope of surveying the remaining terrain, some of it very high and inhospitable, in three years. Enter the RAF. In May/June an RAF Ornithological Society Expedition accounted for more than 20 squares in west Inverness – an exercise executed with expert planning by Squadron Leader Peter Montgomery. Some headway was also made in the first year's other major problem area: Ross. Last year David Gibbons and I directed most of our fieldwork there, thereby contributing to the improvement from 1988's 16% to 1989's 52% coverage. The accompanying map shows the situation after two years throughout Scotland but note that there are still some data to be entered, notably from Shetland. The table of regional coverage indicates more precisely the pattern of coverage in 1989.

Some results

At this early stage we can't say anything too definite about bird distribution and abundance. One reason for this is that there is no such thing as a negative record so far. Clearly, it is possible to obtain a record for any species for any suitable 10km square right up to the end of the 1990 field season. So we can't say with any certainty that a species range has decreased. We may, however, state that a species has expanded its range since the original Breeding Atlas (1968-1972). For example, a glance at distribution maps for Hen Harrier reveals a spread into the northern part of the Great Glen. This species has also colonised the Isle of Man in recent years so a comparison of the old and new Breeding Atlas distribution maps for the British Isles as a whole should be most interesting. Other examinations of New Atlas data which I have made indicate that they are making sense in that they confirm what we already know or suspect. This is true at local and national levels. For example, the Perthshire 10km squares in which Merlin breed correspond to those squares in which substantial areas of moorland occur. Still locally, the breeding distribution of Rock Pipits in Fife agrees with what we already know about the Fife coastline. Simply examples, but the point remains that the obvious is being detected by New Atlas methods. On a national scale Atlas results also agree well with our knowledge of birds derived from other sources. Readers may recall that in 1983 Buzzard and Mute Swan surveys were undertaken. There are no reasons for believing that any great change has taken place in the size of the populations of either of these species in Scotland since 1983, unlike Mute Swan populations in England. It is comforting to know, then, that comparisons between the 1983 censuses and 1988 Atlas abundance data for these two species in Scotland reveal no statistically significant differences between them. So while we are somewhat limited in what we are able to say about bird populations this far into the project we can be confident that the methods we are using will eventually enable us to describe bird populations accurately. We will only be able to do so, of course, if we get all 10km squares surveyed!

Atlas % coverage after 2 years fieldwork
(1st year's figure in brackets)

Aberdeen & Banff	96	(51)
Angus	87	(70)
Argyll (N) & Mull	50	(24)
Argyll (S) & Gigha	59	(22)
Arran, Bute & Cumbrae	71	(29)
Ayrshire	66	(56)
Benbecula & Uists	55	(28)
Borders	90	(73)
Caithness	90	(76)
Central Scotland	90	(74)
Dumfries	75	(55)
Fife & Kinross	100	(87)
Inverness (E) & Speyside	87	(55)
Inverness (W)	84	(14)
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	54	(43)
Kincardine	56	(40)
Kirkcudbright	65	(30)
Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbarton	64	(9)
Lewis & Harris	67	(29)
Lothians	100	(93)
Moray & Nairn	94	(74)
Orkney	96	(78)
Perthshire	85	(46)
Rhum, Eigg, Canna & Muck	100	(100)
Ross	52	(16)
Shetland	63	(25)
Skye	39	(18)
Sutherland	59	(36)
Wigtown	42	(19)
Overall	**67**	**(39)**

Prospects for 1990

Anyone visiting a remote area in the summer of 1990 can help by offering their services to the Regional Organiser; there are unsurveyed squares available in all areas. There are, in addition, large tracts of land which demand urgent attention. The current position is that there are six Atlas regions which need considerable assistance from fieldworkers living furth of those regions. These are Ross (where we need help with about 28 squares), North Argyll (20 squares), Sutherland (12 squares), Skye (10 squares), Shetland (15 squares) and Lanark, Renfrew and Dunbartonshire (20 squares).

At the time of writing I am hopeful that most of Ross-shire can be accounted for and also some of Sutherland. North Argyll and Shetland should also receive a good deal of consideration from various sources. Readers wishing to help could do worse, therefore, than to attempt to do some fieldwork this year in the readily accessible regions of Lanark, Renfrew and Dunbartonshire and Skye. I stress, however, that we need firm offers of

continued

help with all these areas. If you are able to help please either write to me or the relevant Regional Organiser. A list of the names and addresses is given at the end of this article. If you do decide to help with remote squares and you are an SOC member then the Club may make a contribution towards your petrol expenses. The extent of any such assistance will depend on the number of people applying and will favour those travelling in groups to survey several squares. Clearly, there is scope here for SOC Branches to mount mini expeditions to unsurveyed areas.

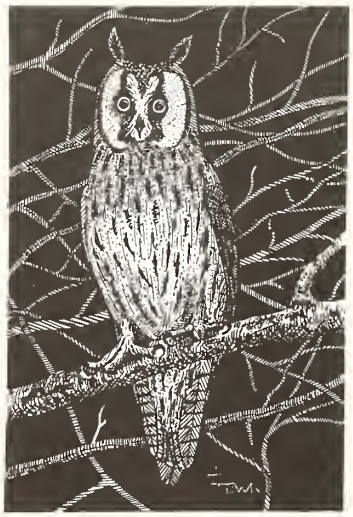
Enclosed with this issue of *SBN* is a Supplementary Record form. Please read it. Everyone is urged to submit it to me or a Regional Organiser with records of species which have been missed in timed tetrad visits. Supplementary Records are vital to the success of the New Atlas; only by receiving them will we get complete distribution maps. While we will use records from all available and reliable sources, eg local bird reports and local atlases, we will still rely to a great extent on everyone feeding their own records directly into the project. If you are unsure whether a species has been recorded in a particular square or not then either ask the Regional Organiser or submit the record anyway.

The priorities of the New Atlas remain the same now as they were at the beginning. They are 1) ensure that every 10 km square is surveyed to the minimum criterion (usually 8 tetrads), 2) ensure that all species occurring in a square are recorded ie ensure that comprehensive supplementary records are submitted for all squares; 3) attempt to survey extras tetrads in already surveyed squares; and 4) upgrade 'seen' records to 'breeding'.

Finally, let me assure readers of the importance of this survey. At the outset I remarked that the results would be used by those who had an interest in conservation and planning whether in the public or private sector. I envisaged this happening at the end of the three years fieldwork. However, it is already the case that data from the New Atlas in Scotland has been used to help formulate policies affecting the Scottish countryside. The SOC's New Atlas data set will go on to prove to be a most worthwhile asset to the Club and the country. Please direct offers of help with the New Atlas and other relevant enquiries to me at 21 Regent Terrace or to a Regional Organiser included in the following list.

Jim Reid

ABERDEEN & BANFF: A Webb, 17 Rubislaw Terr., Aberdeen AB1 1XE. **ANGUS:** B M Lynch, 27 Luke Place, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 2BN. **ARGYLL (N & MULL):** M Madders, Grasspoint Cottage, Lochdon, Craignure, Isle of Mull P64. **ARGYLL (S & Gigha):** D Jardine, 61 Eastwood Grange Rd., Hexham, Northumberland NE46 1VE. **ARRAN, BUTE & CUMBRAE:** D Warner, Castle Cottage, Brodick, Isle of Arran KA27 8HY. **AYRSHIRE:** B D Kerr, 95 Portland St., Troon KA10 6QN. **BENBECULA & UISTS:** P R Boyer, 10 Baile Na Cille, Balivanich, Western Isles PA88 5ND. **BORDERS (Roxburgh & Berwicks):** R J Robertson, 99 Howden Rd., Jedburgh TD8 6JT. **BORDERS (Tweeddale & Ettrick/Lauderdale):** R Murray, 4 Bellfield Cres., Eddleston, Peebleshire EH45 8RU. **CAITHNESS:** E W E Maughan, Burnside, Harbour Rd., Reay, Thurso KW14 7RG. **CENTRAL SCOTLAND:** M E Phillips, Pitsulie Cottage, Shiresmill, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 8ER. **DUMFRIES:** R Mearns, Connansknowe, Kirkton, Dumfries & Galloway DG1 1SX. **FIFE & KINROSS:** N Elkins, 18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 4DX. **INVERNESS (Badenoch & Strathspey):** R Dennis, Inchdryne, Nethybridge PH25 3EF. **INVERNESS (W):** D S Whitaker, Clunes, Achnacarry, Spean Bridge, Inverness-shire PH34 4EJ. **ISLAY JURA & COLONSAY:** D Jardine, 61 Eastwood Grange Rd., Hexham, Northumberland NE46 1VE. **KINCARDINE:** R M Laing, 87 Johnston Gardens East, Peterculter, Aberdeen AB1 0LA. **KIRKCUDBRIGHT:** G Shaw, Kirriereoch, Bargrennan, Newton Stewart, Dumfries & Galloway DG8 6TB. **LANARK, RENFREW & DUNBARTON:** I P Gibson, c/o Beck, 1 Rosebank Terr., Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire PA13 4EW. **LEWIS & HARRIS:** C Reynolds, 50 Strouden Ave., Bournemouth BH8 9HX. **LOTHIANS:** L Souter, Old Mauricewood Mains, Penicuik, Midlothian EH26 0NJ. **MAY, ISLE OF:** B Zonfrillo, 28 Brodie Rd., Glasgow G21 3SB. **MORAY & NAIRN:** M J H Cook, Rowanbrae, Clochan, Buckie, Banffshire AB5 2EQ. **ORKNEY:** C J Corse, Carrisdale, Lynn Park, Kirkwall KW15 1SL. **PERTHSHIRE:** R E Youngman, Atholl Bank, East Moulin Rd., Pitlochry PH16 5HY. **ROSS- and INVERNESS-(E):** R L Swann, 14 St Vincent Rd., Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR & A D K Ramsay, Hardanger, Coulnagour, by Culbokie IV7 8JR. **RHUM, EIGG, CANNA & MUCK:** R L Swann, 14 St Vincent Rd., Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR. **SHETLAND:** J D Okill, Heilinabretta, Cauldhame, Tronda, ZE1 0XL. **SKYE:** A Currie, Glaseilean, Broadford, Skye IV49 9AQ. **SUTHERLAND:** G Bates, 105 Strathy Point, Strathy KW14 7RY. **WIGTOWN:** G Sheppard, The Roddens, Leswalt, Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway DG9 0QR.



Long-eared Owl Steven Brown

Big day on the May

On 28 October 1989 I sailed to the Isle of May from Anstruther with the wind backing south easterly, Force 6, having been easterly earlier in the day. I was rewarded by the sight of flocks of Redwings with lesser numbers of Fieldfares, Song Thrushes and Blackbirds wheeling above the island. As I approached the Alterstanes the calls of the thrushes filled the air and echoed around the cliffs.

After disembarking, which in itself was quite eventful due to the considerable swell, I walked the island to find what other birds were present. These included a few Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, some 30 Bramblings, a Ring Ouzel, four Long-eared Owls and two Short-eared Owls. A Great Grey Shrike had been present earlier. Thrushes had arrived in huge numbers and were scattered throughout the island.

At night we found every available roosting place crammed with thrushes. I was not entirely surprised to find few birds roosting in the bushes of the Heligoland trap entrances since we found the owls roosting and a Sparrowhawk present. Some 50 birds, including the Sparrowhawk, were dazzled and roosted overnight for ringing the next day.

An early morning rise found the wind in the west and many of the thrushes had moved on. My round of the traps produced one Long-eared Owl in the first trap, two in the second and two in the third. I assumed that these were the individuals which had been seen the previous day. I was, however, amazed to find 25 more Long-eared Owls roosting in the Low Trap with a further 20 roosting on the buildings and pipes of the former lighthouse engine room buildings on Fluke Street. Altogether there were at least 50 Long-eared Owls present in the morning, of which 20 were ringed in the course of the day.

Other arrivals found later on the 29th were 10 Twite and a Pallas' Warbler. Twelve Black Redstarts were also present, three of which obligingly roosted above one of the rear doors at the Low Light.

By the 30th most of the Long-eared Owls had departed but on 1 November a further four arrived, one of which was subsequently ringed. About this number continued to be present through much of November. The previous highest count for Long-eared Owls on the Isle of May was six. Altogether a superb end to what was perhaps an otherwise relatively quiet autumn.

Ian Darling

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period October to December is covered here.*

The Whalsay **White-billed Diver** returned yet again in November, when another adult was seen off Rousay. A **Red-necked Grebe** off Stronsay in October was later joined by another, and a **Black-necked Grebe** stayed at Duddingston Loch throughout October. Seawatching was generally poor, the highlights being a **Balearic Shearwater** off Dunbar and a **Leach's Petrel** off Turnberry.

A **Mute Swan** arrived in Shetland in late October and there were high counts of 700 on the Loch of Harray, Orkney and 1,240 at Loch Eye, Highland in November where **Whooper Swans** reached 1,792, a record count for Scotland. The Loch of Harray also held a flock of 800 **Whoopers** while 11 **Bewick's Swans** at Prestwick were also unusual. Loch Eye also produced 4 **Bean Geese,** whilst the **Pink-footed Goose** roost at Strathbeg peaked at 32,500. **Greenland White-fronted Geese** appeared in better than usual numbers at several sites with a single **European** bird recorded in Orkney. **Snow Geese** were seen on the Black Isle, at Loch of Skene, Grampian and Strathbeg. A **Canada Goose** of one of the small races was seen at Hound Point, with 2 others at West Water Reservoir on the same day. **Barnacle Goose** passage produced high numbers in the Lothians in October including 2,000 at Gladhouse Reservoir.

High counts of **Wigeon** included 6,000 on the Loch of Harray and 5,000 at Loch Eye in November. Unusual ducks during the period included a **Black Duck** at Loch Winnoch, **Red-crested Pochard** in Orkney, **Ring-necked Duck** at Meikle Loch, **King Eiders** off Fair Isle and Aberdeenshire, a **Black Scoter** off Gullane Point, single **Surf Scoters** in Burghead Bay, Findhorn Bay and Aberlady, red-head **Smews** at Loch Spynie, Lossiemouth, Invergordon and Dalmellington and a **Ruddy Duck** at Duddingston. Flocks of 1,000 **Pochard** and 700 **Tufted Duck** on the Loch of Harray were very high counts.

Unusual raptors were very scarce. There was only one report of a **Rough-legged Buzzard,** at the Cabrach in October. A **Quail** was found dead on Fair Isle, and another seen on Stronsay. A **Spotted Crake** was seen on Fair Isle where a **Corncrake** was also found dead. The autumn continued to be poor for waders, with the few highlights including an **American Golden Plover** at Spiggie, Shetland.

A **Whimbrel** wintered again on Unst, with a late record at Inverness on 6 October. A **Spotted Redshank** was at Munlochy Bay on 3 December and a **Grey Phalarope** at Barassie in late October.

Although it was a poor autumn for the scarcer **skuas** in most areas, Hound Point produced a total of 163 in October, the highest daily count being 63 on 28th, with the only **Long-tailed Skua** reported also there on 9th. There was a scatter of **Little Gulls** from North Ronaldsay to Lothian. Few **Iceland Gulls** were reported. The highest count of **Glaucous Gulls** was 4 on Unst. One of the best birds

Long-tailed Skua *David Mitchell*

of the period was the fine immature **Ivory Gull** which visited a small loch on Yell for a few days from 2 December.

A late **Sandwich Tern** stayed on Stronsay until the end of November; earlier in the month **Little Auks** had begun to appear around Shetland, the highest count being 60 in Sullom Voe on 28th.

Two **Turtle Doves** were seen in Shetland, but much more unusual was a **Barn Owl** of the white-breasted form on Unst from 10 October into December. An influx of **Long-eared Owls** on 1 November included a count of 46 on the Isle of May. Also unusual was **Kingfisher** at the mouth of the Don, and a **Hoopoe,** which was ringed in Caithness in early October, only to be seen in Orkney on 17th where it died the next day.

Records of **Short-toed Larks** came from Shetland, on Fair Isle and another on North Ronaldsay, with 2 **Shore Larks** at Tyninghame.

There were several **Richard's Pipits** on the Northern Isles. A **Pechora Pipit** on Fair Isle from 4-24 October was preceded by one on North Ronaldsay on 3 October, the first record in Scotland outside Shetland.

In contrast to last year there were only two **Waxwing** records, both on Fair Isle. One of the rarest birds of the period was a male **Pied Wheatear** on Fair Isle on 10 October. A **Ring Ouzel** was still present in Fife on the late date of 7 December. Numbers of Scandinavian **thrushes** recorded were smaller than in the previous two autumns; even so there were counts of 5,500 **Fieldfares** on Fair Isle on 29 October, with 1,100 on Unst on the following day, 5,000 **Redwings** on Fair Isle on 4 October, with 10,000 on 29th when large numbers were seen on the Grampian coast.

Rare and scarce warblers were well represented with a **Lanceolated Warbler** on Fair Isle, a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** trapped on North Ronaldsay, two **Pallas's Warblers** in Shetland, one at Cape Wrath and another at Cruden Bay, but few **Yellow-browed Warblers.** A **Radde's Warbler** at Cruden Bay on 12 November was probably the latest British record and a **Dusky Warbler** was in Shetland. The more common warblers only occurred in small numbers, but 4 **eastern Chiffchaffs** in Ayrshire were unusually far west. The fall of 29 October included single **Firecrests** in Orkney and Grampian.

Orkney had an influx of at least 22 **Long-tailed Tits** in November and Fair Isle had a **Coal Tit.** The only **Red-backed Shrike** reported was in Shetland on 3 November, but there was a good scattering of **Great Greys.** The Durness **Rose-coloured Starling** stayed into October.

The less usual finches included up to 10 **Arctic Redpolls** in Shetland and Orkney, where there were also 2 **Hawfinches.**

Buntings were poorly represented with a maximum of 8 **Lapland Buntings** on Fair Isle, a **Little Bunting** at Voe, Shetland and 3 others on Fair Isle.

Pete Ellis

Viking

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The Planning Game

Most readers of this magazine will have felt concern at a development proposal that seems to threaten an area they know. But how do you go about objecting and what is it like to stand up at a Public Inquiry and present your case? John Hunt describes how he and his wife became involved in an ongoing planning controversy over part of the East Lothian coast.

Archerfield Estate lies between the historic village of Dirleton and the coast of East Lothian. Its 950 acres of farmland and woodland have been managed for many years as a very private estate with Muirfield golf course to the west and the beaches of Yellowcraig and North Berwick to the east. The coastline here is one of the most delightful and unspoilt stretches on the east coast with marvellous views of the islands of Fidra and Eyebroughy just offshore.

Archerfield was the setting for Robert Louis Stevenson's romantic adventure story "Pavilion on the Links". Even today this comparatively remote area of sand dunes and woods can conjure up the wild and dangerous atmosphere of that stirring tale.

Because access to this three mile stretch of coast is only possible from either end, only the more active walkers and birdwatchers make the effort to get there. Its comparative lack of human disturbance is undoubtedly a key reason why it is one of the most important sites in Britain for moulding Eider, with up to 5000 gathering here in late summer. Together with nesting seabirds and wintering waders, it all adds up to a very special place for birds and is duly designated as an SSSI.

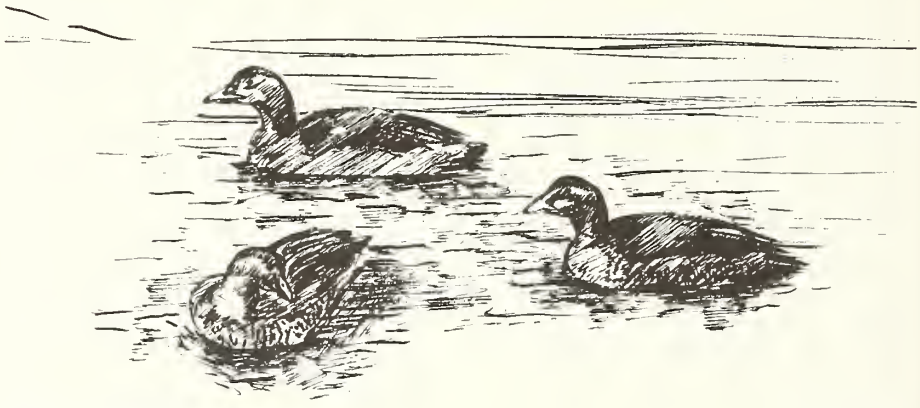
My wife Janet and I had known this area for a number of years but never dreamt that it could be under threat or that one day we would find ourselves fighting a Public Inquiry about its future.

Public Meeting

When late in 1988 rumours reached us that a proposed golf course development at Archerfield might be a front for several hundred houses we were vaguely concerned but it seemed unlikely that we would actually get round to doing anything. However, quite coincidentally, Janet and I had been doing some research into the historical interest of the area which proved to be considerable and this gave extra stimulus. Even so, when a public meeting was called in Dirleton village hall one evening last February, it was touch and go whether I bothered to go, especially as I couldn't borrow a car and ended up cycling from North Berwick on an old bike I hadn't ridden for ages.

The public meeting was confused and unsatisfactory as such affairs tend to be. Those few who knew something about the development proposals stayed quiet and the rest of us were left to speculate fruitlessly. However I came away convinced that something was afoot and sufficiently concerned to take it further.

One thing had come out of the meeting and that was that the District Council were proposing to change the Local Plan to allow development to proceed in an area which otherwise was protected by various conservation designations. This change, or Alteration No.3 as it was called, proposed to designate the whole 950 acres of Archerfield for development. The official notice regarding this had gone in the local paper on January 6th and, needless to say, went largely unnoticed. However, there was just time to object before the end of the statutory six weeks, which we duly did.



Moulting Eiders at Eyebroughy *David Ashley*

Our objection seemed to vanish into thin air and it was with some surprise that several weeks later we welcomed two gentlemen from the District Council. They drank lots of coffee and tried hard to talk us into withdrawing our objection. We were flattered by their attention but unimpressed by their arguments. Their evident support for a large scale development was worrying.

Major development

Interestingly, it emerged that, if we sustained our objection to the change in the Local Plan, the District Council would be obliged to hold a Public Inquiry to consider the matter in detail. This is quite different to a Planning Application when the Council can ignore individual objections and indeed usually seem to do so!

Our fears that a major development was in the offing were confirmed when an Outline Planning Application was submitted for a £70 million development involving, in addition to the two golf courses, a 100 bedroom hotel and country club, 150 holiday flats and 350 houses. The golf courses and houses were shown going right up to the coast and there was obviously a threat to the important wildlife interest as well as to the archaeological features which had come to light.

It became increasingly clear to us that the Local Plan was crucially important. It would set the framework for future developments and, if altered as proposed by the District Council, it would give the green light to practically unlimited development at Archerfield.

Public Inquiry

With some trepidation we stuck to our guns and refused to withdraw our objection. By this time we were the only objectors and we didn't relish the thought of a set piece battle with the District Council. However, it did seem that a Public Inquiry might be the only opportunity for a full discussion of the important issues at stake.

Our first battle was to get a date fixed for the Inquiry when we could attend. The District Council were in a hurry to get it over with and insisted on arranging a date when they knew we would be away on holiday. We eventually had to write to the Secretary of State before the Council gave in and arranged a later date when we could attend.

A Public Inquiry is rather like an informal court hearing held in front of a professional Reporter, who is appointed by the Secretary of State. The Reporter is the crucial figure as he decides on much of the procedure for the Inquiry and is the person you are trying to convince. It is his recommendations which will largely determine the outcome.

Through my work with the RSPB I had previously attended two Public Inquiries as a witness so I had some idea of what was in store. However, I had never attempted to lead a case or cross examine the other side so it was a somewhat daunting prospect.

Preparing your case

At an Inquiry you can present your case by yourself or bring witnesses who will help to do so for you. The latter course is better as witnesses should lend credibility to your cause especially if they can be presented as experts in their fields. However, if they are unconvincing, especially under cross examination, they may be a liability.

We were very fortunate in that we were able to find five excellent witnesses who were prepared to cover most of the different aspects of concern. Because the national conservation organisations had not been aware of the full implications of Alteration No.3, they had not been able to object in time but now the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, RSPB and SWT all kindly agreed to appear as witnesses. Two other local people also bravely volunteered to represent concern at the possible impact on landscape and local amenity, including the village of Dirleton. The only aspect we were left to present entirely ourselves was the historical and archaeological side, though

even here two organisations were prepared to write supporting letters.

All the evidence given at the Inquiry had to be prepared in writing as well as being presented verbally. It is the written word which is all important as that is what the Reporter takes away. There was much to do beforehand making sure the evidence was relevant and accurate because if it is not, and the other side exposes that at the Inquiry, then you are in trouble. Talking it through with friends and witnesses helps to identify gaps and weaknesses in your arguments. It all means giving up a lot of time in the weeks running up to the Inquiry but it will be worth the effort. Numerous drafts had to be corrected so Janet was kept busy typing while the photocopier was warm churning out the copies.

Presenting the evidence

For us the two day Inquiry went as well as we could have hoped. Though far from a relaxing experience in front of 100 people it was not quite the ordeal we had feared. Janet handled the papers and kept me straight with little notes while I played the advocate trying hard not to lapse into the courtroom jargon of L.A. Law. Our witnesses came over splendidly especially Stan da Prato who presented the case for the Lothians Branch of the SWT as well as the SOC. The District Council were not as well prepared as they might have been and much of our evidence went unchallenged. Even my doubtful credentials for waxing enthusiastically about bronze age burial cairns escaped attack!

The final stage of the Inquiry was a site visit in the pouring rain to look at the coastline whose conservation importance had been extolled at such lengths over the previous day and a half. As though on cue more than 2000 moulting Eider moved out to sea as soon as our party came in sight - one of the most impressive demonstrations of disturbance you could hope to see!

Increased awareness

Interestingly the Inquiry acted as a focus for local concern and publicity so that by the end far more people were aware of the issues and what was at risk. We now await the Reporter's recommendations on the Local Plan but, whatever they prove to be, the District Council has now been made aware of the importance and sensitivity of Archerfield and the level of local concern.

Development pressures on land in the south of England are now horrendous and several recent large schemes in various parts of Scotland show that developers are looking for easier opportunities north of the Border. We should perhaps all of us be on our guard for the wrong kind of housing and tourism developments, especially those that may start small but will surely grow. As an individual it is easy to feel powerless but in fact we can all play a part. If enough people care surprising things can happen.

John Hunt

The Reporter's findings were made public as this issue went to press. John's efforts were rewarded by recommendations that only golf courses and associated facilities should be allowed and large housing developments were not appropriate. It remains to be seen how the District Council will respond.

Paisley Moss

Paisley Moss was a very unique habitat. Situated just to the north of the town, at the location of some old clay mines, it was a marshy field with some areas of peat. Twenty or so hectares in extent, it was grazed throughout the year by a herd of about sixty Galloway cattle. Disturbance to the marsh at some time in the past (perhaps infill attempts during the Second World War, when Abbotsinch Airport was in operation), led in some parts to the formation of a base of red blaes overlain by very rich mud with a high clay content. Out of this mud grew a rich marsh flora, dominated by rushes and sedges. Shallow pools supported a profusion of aquatic plants. The cattle played an important part in maintaining the vegetation at just the right height, as well as providing trampled muddy edges, for both breeding and passage waders.

Between 1962 and 1970, when, unfortunately, the main area of marsh was lost due to the extension of the runway at Glasgow Airport, twenty-four different species of waders were recorded, mainly by George White, Hector Galbraith and myself. These times produced many memorable sightings, like the seven lekking Ruffs in April 1966, or the highly excited flock of sixteen summer plumaged Black-tailed Godwits one sunny spring day. Spring Temminck's Stints turned up on two occasions.

But most of all I remember the Wood Sandpipers. This was the spring passage wader of Paisley Moss. George and Hector had recorded a number of birds there in 1963, which they had not identified with certainty, only that they were either Green or Wood Sandpipers. In the light of subsequent records, they were almost certainly all of the latter species. My first memory, from early May 1964, was of a flock of four Wood Sandpipers behaving very much like the commoner Redshanks, flying in circles over the marsh, singing and displaying. On my next visit a week later only one bird was seen, although it spent some time in song flight after I had disturbed it from the main pond. My diary from that day records that on several occasions it sang, on quivering wings, only twenty feet above my head!

For the remainder of May and June that year we observed one or two Wood Sandpipers now and again, although admittedly not on every visit. The strange thing, looking back, is that not once did it enter our minds that they might be attempting to breed. I think we assumed that we were witnessing a passage, that we were seeing different birds each time. Maybe we were, but if similar occurrences were observed nowadays, I suspect that the RSPB would be called in, and the whole affair kept a closely guarded secret!

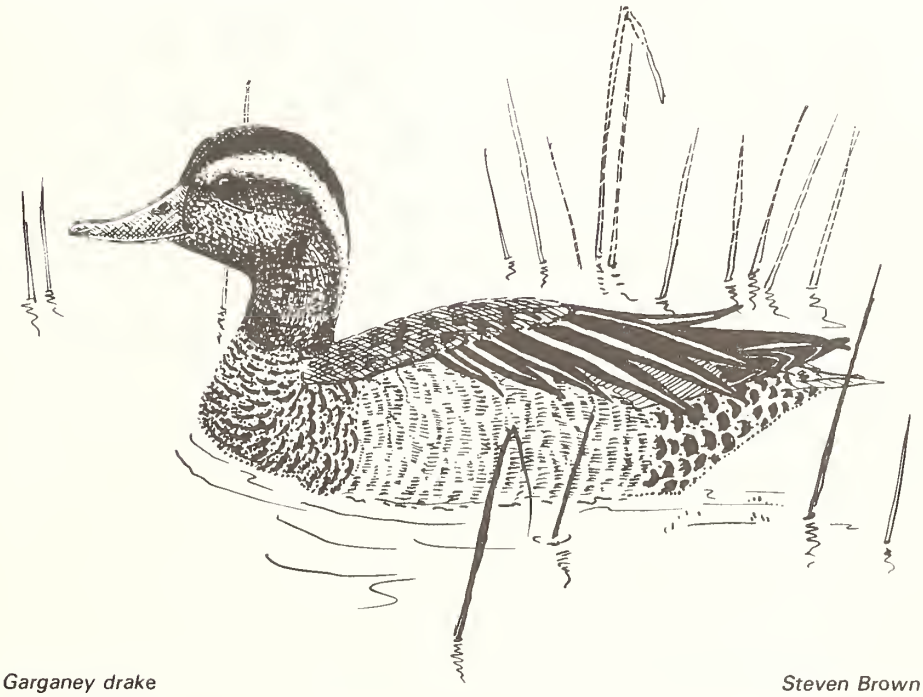
One particularly intriguing memory, from May 1965, is of watching a Wood Sandpiper alight and disappear into dense vegetation in a drier part of 'the Moss'. I was puzzled at my inability to flush the bird despite walking to within yards of where it had settled. Was it on a nest? Unfortunately this possibility did not occur to me, and I was distracted by the appearance of a male Garganey in the marsh nearby. The slightly worrying aspect to these memories is that if the Wood Sandpipers were indeed attempting to breed, their efforts may have been thwarted due to unintentional disturbance by a group of innocent young birdwatchers.

Wood Sandpipers continued to appear on passage at Paisley Moss over the next five or six years, usually singles, but two birds on a few occasions, and still singing sometimes. There was no obvious behaviour which suggested breeding after 1965, and never any real proof of breeding, although the presence of an apparently juvenile Wood Sandpiper on 1 July 1965 was rather suspicious.

Iain Gibson

Edinburgh Zoo's Night Heron

We have an interesting report from SOC member G.J. Price, from Basingstoke, about a colour sighting of an immature Night Heron on the River Avon, Downton, Wiltshire, on 9 December 1989. It appears to have been a bird from Edinburgh Zoo ringed as a chick in 1989.



Garganey drake *Steven Brown*

Scottish Raptors

Birds of prey are hardly the easiest species to study. Most nest high in trees or in cliffs, often at low densities and in remote places. Illegal persecution creates further problems for the raptor enthusiast. Yet there is no group of birds that is more likely to bring out an audience. This certainly happened at the 1989 SOC Autumn Conference when the 160 residential places were booked up well in advance and around 150 other members had to stay elsewhere or attend as day visitors.

What controls raptor numbers?

Raptors are popular with bird watchers but many species are far from common and some decidedly rare. It is essential to know the reasons for this before resources are spent trying to conserve birds of prey. Ian Newton ably outlined the main factors that control raptor numbers.

With some species nest sites, such as cliffs or trees with existing nests, are important. Evidence for this comes in the form of increases in populations when artificial nest sites are introduced; for example Kestrels increased on the treeless Dutch polders when nest boxes were put up. When nest sites are available raptors often occur at regular intervals. If birds are removed replacements often appear, indicating that territorial behaviour limits the size of the breeding population. This is linked to food availability which, when humans do not interfere, is the single most important factor affecting the numbers of birds of prey.

Lack of food is one reason for the scarcity of some species, notably large scavengers such as vultures and some eagles, in much of modern Europe. This is likely to get worse as farming becomes more efficient and fewer carcasses are available. In contrast parts of the Third World still hold very high numbers of some raptors. Some Indian cities have the highest densities recorded, a high proportion being Black Kites. These numbers also reflect the fact that the local population is fairly tolerant, at least until they become rich enough to afford firearms. Persecution nowadays is as important as more natural factors in determining the distribution of many raptors. Even when deliberate persecution does not occur people affect raptors through habitat change and the use of chemicals which have an important effect on long lived species at the top of food chains.

As some raptors are large, long lived birds their reproductive rates are low and they are relatively easy to exterminate. As the ranges of some species are so large nature reserves tend to be of less value to raptors than to many other birds.

The Kestrel

Andy Village described how Kestrel studies in recently afforested uplands at Eskdalemuir and arable and mixed farms in East Anglia demonstrated the link between food supply and breeding.

At Eskdalemuir voles were by far the most important food for Kestrels. Voles were often hard to obtain in winter due to snow cover and natural cycles and Eskdalemuir Kestrels were more migratory than birds from the English lowlands; some adults moved as far as the continent. The English birds were more sedentary but occurred at lower densities, with the intensive arable areas lower than the mixed farms. Their laying dates were also later than in Scotland. This apparently surprising finding was explained by the need for female Kestrels to receive enough food from their mates through

Hen Merlin and chick *Brian Turner*
Third prize in 1989 Photo Competition

courtship and egg laying. Competent males were usually older birds that could hunt more efficiently than first year males. Vole numbers in winter and early spring had a big effect on the survival of Kestrels, especially the number of first year birds that were recruited into the breeding population. Removal experiments demonstrated that with a relatively common species "spare" birds are available to take up territories that fall vacant.

Sea Eagle success story

Readers of this magazine will be well aware of the reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles to Scotland using young birds from Norwegian eyries. John Love provided the conference with up to date information and some interesting slides, notably those demonstrating similarities between their Norwegian habitat and the west of Scotland.

Between 1975 and 1985 39 male and 43 female eagles were released on Rhum. The survival rate has been high and it is estimated that between 50% and 75% of these birds are still alive. By 1988 at least ten pairs were holding territory. The first young eaglet to fledge from a Scottish nest since 1916 did so in 1985. It was followed by two in 1986, three in 1987 and two in 1988. However overall breeding success is still rather low. The first eagles to be released on Rhum did not try to breed till they were eight or nine years old. This may be because they were originally intended to be the nucleus of a captive breeding programme and were habituated to people. Later releases were deliberately given as little contact with humans as possible and they are exhibiting breeding behaviour at around six which is similar to wild eagles.

Traces of pollutants such as PCBS and mercury have been found in the eggs and feathers of Scottish Sea Eagles but so far there is no evidence that these are at dangerous levels. Behavioural reasons may be the cause of low breeding success. Several territories have trios rather than pairs and interference may be detrimental.

The real test for the Sea Eagle project will be whether the young now being reared in the wild in Scotland will reproduce successfully when they are old enough.

Red Kites

Red Kites were released in Scotland in 1989 as described in *SBN 15*. Roy Dennis used the Friday evening slide show to update the situation. The Scottish birds came from the flourishing Swedish population where the productivity of young is so high that some can be exported with no detrimental effects. Two groups of three young Kites were brought to Scotland and initially kept captive, but out of sight of people, as with the Sea Eagles. Areas known to be good for Buzzards were chosen as release sites in the hope that these would provide sufficient food and freedom from persecution. So far things have gone fairly well. Survival has been good, though some birds have wandered over considerable distances, with reports from Orkney in the north, Biggar in the south and Islay in the west. *Between writing this report and going to press we learned one of the Kites had been poisoned in the Highlands.*

Hen Harriers

This is probably the species that arouses most debate at present (see for instance *SBN 9*). Donald Watson first saw a Hen Harrier in August 1935. At that time it was a great rarity. It gradually expanded, helped by forestry and a reduction in keepering. Harriers are raptors that people either love or hate. Donald made it plain what his feelings are through a selection of his paintings showing aspects of the birds' behaviour, mostly from south west Scotland. This unusual but welcome technique meant that the audience could enjoy and learn about behaviour such as food passing in flight, or communal winter roosts, that is not easy to photograph.

Donald is in no doubt that Harriers are now declining in many parts of Scotland. Several reasons are involved but persecution by keepers, especially on grouse moors, is undoubtedly significant. Hen Harriers may now be no more numerous than Golden Eagles, and at least as important, as we hold around 20% of the European population. Grouse moors can provide good Harrier habitat as very long, rank heather is not suitable. However this presumes a more enlightened attitude by keepers and owners. This issue is one about which we can expect to hear a great deal more when current research work is published.

Elusive Merlins

Several experienced bird tour leaders consider Merlin the hardest species to show visiting birdwatchers. Many estimates of Merlin numbers have been too low. A number of enthusiasts have embarked on Merlin studies in recent years and this has led to higher estimates of the Merlin population in several areas. One such is in Grampian where Graham Rebecca and his friends have located over 80 territories where only a handful of nests were known previously.

Promiscuous Edinburgh females!

Mike McGrady came to Edinburgh from Florida to study urban Sparrowhawks. Edinburgh and Prague have the biggest population of these hawks in Europe. This is a recent phenomenon following the species recovery from the effects of pesticides to high population levels. In Edinburgh there are around 50 pairs; Prague, with more suitable habitat, has about 90. Edinburgh is now probably "full up" with only some large and treeless housing estates lacking resident hawks.

Sparrowhawks demonstrate that at least some species of raptor can successfully live alongside people. For example there is a breeding pair in Princes Street Gardens. People do have an effect on the hawks and there are interesting differences between the urban birds and those studied in forests elsewhere in Scotland. Town hawks rarely kill pigeons since they don't like to spend too long on prey on the ground out in the open, where people and other potential predators, like cats and dogs, could attack them. Turnover in the Edinburgh birds is high, with many one year olds in the breeding population, indicating high mortality. Some of this is due to airguns, much of it probably due to accidents with traffic and collisions with buildings.

A feature of Sparrowhawks is that females are much larger than males. In the early part of the breeding season males seen unable to stop their mates mating with other males. This promiscuity means a female whose mate turns out to be a poor father should still produce fertile eggs. From the male's point of view it is clearly undesirable if he expends energy rearing a rival's offspring so territorial defence increases considerably near to laying. This places great demands on the male who still has to hunt for himself and his mate. Analysis of the DNA of Sparrowhawk chicks has revealed that about half of the Edinburgh nests show evidence of an intruder's genes.

Threats to Scottish Raptors

This topic has often featured in this magazine and Dave Dick of RSPB told the conference that there is still no sign of him being out of a job. He knew of over thirty poisoning cases in Scotland in 1989 and had no doubt this was merely the tip of the iceberg.

Most cases come to light when a walker stumbles across a corpse or poisoned bait. The fact that over a hundred dogs have died after swallowing poison gives a better indication of the scale of the problem. It simply is not true that only an "irresponsible but tiny minority" of gamekeepers are involved, to quote a favourite theme of letter writers from the shooting lobby. This has been confirmed on the few occasions when sufficient evidence was available to bring a court case. As we reported in *SBN 15* one keeper found guilty of illegally killing birds of prey claimed over 400 estates used substances such as Alphachloralose. To the question of whether such persecution actually limits raptor numbers Dave pointed to the number of "Buzzard free zones" in parts of Scotland which look entirely suitable for this species. Furthermore, if Britain cannot get its act together on this issue it makes it more difficult to persuade other EEC countires, especially around the Mediterranean, to accept the need to curb the widespread killing of migratory birds.

Poisoning is not the only threat. Taxidermy is again a problem as it now seems to be fashionable again in some quarters to have stuffed birds in the house. A few professional taxidermists are undoubtedly buying birds that have been killed illegally. One slide of a freezer full of Sparrowhawks showed that the claim that only genuine casualties are used in this trade is often untrue.

Some species have special problems. One such is the Peregrine. Falconers still prize wild Peregrines and many in the audience were surprised at just how many captive birds there are in Britain; Dept. of Environment records show 1100, most of which are not even flown regularly. This number makes one wonder whether there is any justification for licensing people to take further birds from the wild. Surely captive breeding should now be capable of supplying all the falcons that are legitimately required.

Disturbance is often quoted as a threat to breeding birds. Dave pointed out that it is often an excuse for landowners – one might add some conservationists – to exclude people from their land or to shift responsibility for damage to wildlife. Birdwatchers, and especially photographers, do sometimes cause problems though the percentage really is a tiny proportion of the many people who enjoy bird watching. 35% of monitored Peregrine sites in south Scotland failed in 1989 due to disturbance, not all of it accidental.

Hobby *Steven Brown*

The best way to limit persecution is for people to use their eyes and ears. Unfavourable publicity and several successful convictions have led to a decrease in the more obvious activities such as the use of pole traps. Poisoning is harder to detect and a change in the law would help. If owners or tenants were made responsible for what happened on their land then poisoning would almost disappear overnight.

The Scottish Raptor Groups

Every year *SBN* publishes a Raptor Round Up, a summary of the fieldwork done by dozens of dedicated enthusiasts, mostly amateurs, which would cost many thousands of pounds if it had to be done as contract research. It was therefore appropriate that the final talk was on the activities of one of these groups, the South West Scotland Raptor Study Group. Don Smith "fronted" it and used a selection of his excellent slides to show both the birds and their devotees in action.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the speakers who, in order of appearance, were Ian Newton, Andy Village, John Love, Dave Dick, Mike McGrady, Graham Rebecca, Donald Watson and Don Smith, to Don and Annie for projecting, to Alastair, Daphne and the staff for organising and to everyone else who helped. Next year the Conference will be in the Marine again on the slightly earlier weekend of 2nd-4th November with the theme of Scottish Islands.

Golden Eagle attacking Red Deer

On 29 September, 1989 I saw an immature eagle (probably second year) chase a yearling/hind down the side of Meall Tionail in the central Cairngorms. The chase was over a distance of at least 100 metres and lasted 10-15 seconds with the eagle twisting and turning very close behind the deer. The hillside ws quite steep (25% slope), though the deer did not run directly downhill. I had watched the eagle for several minutes before the incident, and had also seen the deer; about thirty were grazing on heather moorland grouped loosely into stags and hinds. The eagle was at first flying at an oblique angle to the deer. At about a mile distant it turned towards them and approached low along the hillside. The individual attacked was near a small group of hinds and did not seem to differ from them. It ran off downhill at high speed with the eagle virtually grasping its rump. There ws no apparent reason for the chase ending.

It is unlikely that an eagle could seriously injure so large an animal as this deer, but if it had stumbled and become lame, or crippled, success would have been more likely. Attacks by eagles on deer have been described in several recent articles (*SB* 14:86, 209). The attacking bird has usually been immature and calves were involved in four of the six first-hand reports. The present incident appears to be the first description of an extensive chase.

Stephen Welch

Literature on Falcons wanted

For the past five years I have been collecting literature on the Peregrine Falcon and related species along the lines of the **Working Bibliography of the Peregrine Falcon** which appeared in 1987. Presently, my collection comprises over 3,000 titles. The aim is to assemble all available references on that subject worldwide, and build a Central Literature Collection, which will be the basis for a planned monograph on the Peregrine Falcons of the world. In order to complete this collection and keep it updated, I would be grateful for your support by sending me lists of publications, personal reprints and papers. For those interested the perusal of my collection is possible, and copies from publications can be obtained. **Dieter Schmidl, Peregrine Bibliography, D-8130 Seewiesen, FRG, Post Starnberg Tel. 08157-29/268.**

Italian Bird Protection

As a keen birdwatcher you will know that each year millions of birds are killed in Italy. You may also know that Italian conservation organisations are fighting hard to stop the killing and one of the most effective is the Italian League for Bird Protection. Also, in spite of the killing, there are still excellent places to watch birds in Italy – for example, at the League's thirteen reserves. A branch has now been established in Britain to focus special attention on the slaughter of birds in Italy, to raise funds for bird protection schemes in Italy and to inform British birdwatchers of the opportunities which exist there. In the Spring of 1990 we will be launching a major campaign in Britain.

If you want to become involved contact the UK representative: **Mr Roger Jordan, 6 Butlers Close, Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 5BE Telephone: Chelmsford 440567.**

Protecting birds across Britain: NCC's ornithological role

The Government's proposed break-up of their own conservation advisors, the Nature Conservancy Council, and the subsequent merger of NCC's Scottish arm with the Countryside Commission for Scotland, are currently being hotly debated. Critics of the change have demanded that a group of scientists be retained with a UK remit as the only effective, and the most efficient, way of organising research and science-based policies. Such work is currently undertaken by the Chief Scientist Directorate (CSD), whose world-renowned specialist expertise must remain if conservation is not to suffer. A remit to promote nature conservation across Great Britain is necessary so as to represent Britain on international bodies such as the EEC, since the world is a small place for many birds. But what does CSD do as far as birds are concerned and what would be lost if it were disbanded? In this article Dr Mike Pienkowski, Head of CSD's Ornithology Branch, explains how NCC's bird specialists evaluate sites and promote policies for bird conservation elsewhere, in the 'wider countryside', with special reference to Scotland.

In common with most countries, Britain's countryside has undergone many changes in recent years. The major differences between the changes of recent decades and those of the preceding hundreds of years are their speed and scale, largely as a result of technological and chemical assistance, as well as national financial support for certain types of agriculture and forestry. The rapidity of change has broken the close links between traditional farming practices, the semi-natural landscape in which these are set, and the animals which depend on these. Improvements in technology and transport have also led to geographic specialisations, with cereal growing in eastern Britain and stock rearing in the west. Hedgerows have been lost, land drained, and agricultural activity generally intensified. Consequently, in many areas, the valuable bird habitats depending on mosaics of land-use types have been lost, as have many of the characteristic regional patterns of land-use and birds.

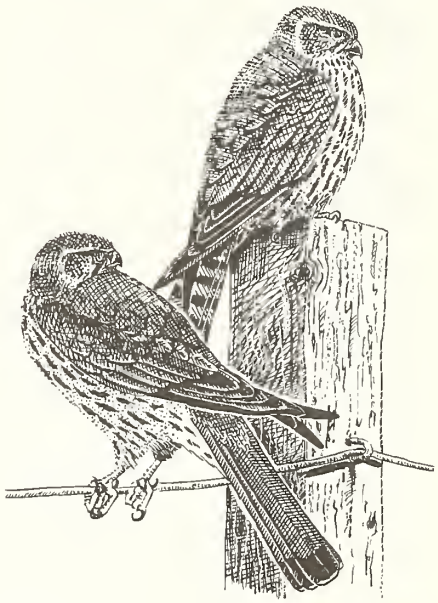
Opportunities for change

Countryside policies are now changing as a result of agricultural over-production, long-term water pollution due to fertilisers, and the increasing public desire to retain attractive countryside with healthy populations of wildlife. There are, therefore, opportunities to enhance nature conservation if appropriate information on the requirements of wildlife is available. This would allow soundly based advice to be provided to national and local government on the development of country-side policies.

The Nature Conservancy Council is the body established by Parliament to advise on and promote nature conservation throughout Britain, and to commission research to support these functions. It is sometimes useful to consider two approaches to nature conservation: site safeguard (including nature reserves), and broader policies relating to the much larger areas outside such reserves. This division is not absolute, and both approaches are necessary and complementary. A major component of the research we commission concerns the monitoring of change. We are attempting to combine this work with information on relationships between birds and land-types to set targets for improvement of the landscape.

Protecting important sites

Much of NCC's work is involved in protecting important bird sites, either on National Nature Reserves or SSSIs. If these sites are of international importance, they may qualify for designation as Special Protection Areas under



Merlins *Steven Brown*

EEC legislation (e.g. the Cairngorms: see *SBN 14:* 1-2, June 1989) or as internationally important wetlands under the Ramsar Convention.

Information to identify such areas comes from a variety of sources. In some cases, such as for some breeding seabirds, there may be nearly complete information on distribution and numbers. This enables the most important sites to be identified. In other cases, the relative importance of a site may be judged against results from extensive survey work. For instance, the NCC's guidelines for the selection of SSSIs use, amongst other methods, data from the BTO's Register of important bird sites. Because most of these surveys cover the whole of Britain, this enables a site to be placed into context; a habitat that contains an outstanding assemblage of birds for northern Scotland may be much more typical of Wales or England. Equally, habitats which may seem common at a local or regional scale may be rare in British, European or even World terms. The Hebridean machairs and, even more outstandingly, the Flow Country are obvious examples. It was survey work undertaken or commissioned by CSD which detailed their importance. Reviews of international distributions and numbers supported by CSD have placed these results in context. The same can apply to bird populations; wintering geese are commonplace on Islay, but the birds present represent most of the world numbers of the two populations concerned.

Apart from the identification and assessment of areas of importance, these studies and their interpretation are essential in public inquiries and other situations, where the conservation case often depends on establishing the British and international importance of the site. Survey techniques are continually being refined, and information on the international context gradually improves. However, with current countryside threats, we can never wait until we have complete knowledge of a habitat or species. Tomorrow is too late!

Monitoring birds in the wider countryside

Many species – particularly large and mobile ones such as birds – require conservation measures over the whole countryside. Indeed, it is this wider countryside which most people experience and wish to maintain. The needs for wider countryside monitoring can be summarised as monitoring populations and performance of sensitive species, monitoring to fulfil international treaty commitments, answering Parliamentary enquiries, advising local authorities and others, providing input into study of wide-scale changes (global warming, acid precipitation, other environmental pollution etc). Apart from setting context and comparison for the effectiveness of site-safeguarding, bird monitoring in the wider countryside addresses the wildlife resources directly experienced by most of the public. Such monitoring has proved invaluable in providing early warning of problems in the human environment. The best example concerns the organopesticides and birds of prey in the 1950s and 1960s. A further opportunity arising from monitoring work concerns the setting of positive targets for wildlife and countryside resource.

Britain is fortunate in having a large number of skilled amateur ornithologists, but popular interest in birds also leads to high public expectation that bird information should be available and presented in conservation cases. One of our challenges is to work with these volunteers to enable effective conservation of a range of natural interest, not just limited to birds.

In undertaking the biological recording work for birds, NCC usually works in partnership with various independent societies. The largest segment of such work is done with the BTO. The Common Birds Census is one example of a contract from NCC to BTO to monitor changes in bird populations in the British countryside from the early 1960s, when changes due to hedgerow removal, pesticides, etc were becoming apparent.

Other examples are the National Wildfowl Counts organised by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry and the BTO/SOC/IWC New Breeding Birds Atlas. We also have links with many local groups, and coordinate local surveys and national programmes, resulting in publications such as the SOC/NCC *Birds of Coll and Tiree*.

Relating changes in bird populations to possible causes

If monitoring schemes are well designed, they may be able to give some clue as to the underlying causes of change. This is additionally important in long-lived bird species, as the buffering effect of immature birds may delay the point at which changes in productivity or survival rates become obvious. By this means, monitoring of Arctic Terns in Shetland identified the breeding failure of terns and the shortage of their sand-eel food in the early 1980s. This was several years before the decline was apparent in population numbers, and allowed more detailed examination concurrent with continuing changes. Similarly, the NCC-commissioned Seabird Monitoring Programme was able to examine the geographical context of the change in this, and other species, on the national scale needed to give clues as to causes. Problems for seabirds were more widespread that just Shetland, but not so pronounced elsewhere. This, in turn, helps to point to possible causes, and our studies were able to provide light and remove heat from discussions between the fishing industry and conservationists.

The geographical patterns in changes may also point to the need for further investigation. The Seabird Colony Register, organised by NCC and the Seabird Group, surveyed seabird colonies in 1986-88, and compared the results with earlier work in 1969-70. Cormorants have increased along most coasts of Britain and Ireland, but decreased in western and northern Scotland. As the latter areas are those of major developments in marine fish-farming in this period, it seems likely that these are linked.

A comparison between environment and the decline in numbers of wintering Dunlins, revealed by the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry demonstrated the relationship between the decline in Dunlins and the loss of feeding habitat due to spread of *Spartina townsendii* over mud-flats. This species of *Spartina* resulted from hybridisation between native and introduced American species. This was the first demonstrated relationship, at a national scale, between habitat loss and a decline in wintering wader populations on estuaries.

Forward planning and target setting

Most of the examples above relate to a reporting of change and investigating why this happened. This may be used to avoid similar problems in the future. However, we would like to move towards an even more positive approach, whereby we could aim for actual improvements in the environment. If one combines the monitoring of wildlife with information on relationships with habitats and the land-use practices which influence those habitats, one can move towards a position of setting positive targets for conservation in the countryside and monitoring how well those are achieved. We are developing this approach, using birds as a convenient focus. Birds are among the most appropriate organisms on which to base a wildlife monitoring scheme. This is because of their positions at the top of food-chains, their observability, the popular interest, and the network of observers to provide the results in a very cost-effective way.

The overall scheme is a major initiative, as it necessitates an approach covering the whole of Great Britain, as well as international links. We are moving towards this progressively in ways which will allow eventual integration. In the rest of this article, I wish to outline some of the ways in which we are doing this.

Seabirds at sea and the oil industry

Britain holds breeding seabird populations of international importance. That these birds depend, throughout the year, on the wider marine environment is sometimes overlooked. The need to survey this vast area became apparent with the development of the oil production industry and the need to take account of natural interest in planning this. The current phase of NCC's Seabirds at Sea programme aims to determine which areas of Britain's waters are particularly important for seabirds and how this varies during the year, with particular reference to the seas west of Britain. This is of especial relevance to the oil industry and Government departments concerned with mitigating the impacts of oil spills. NCC has brought together a consortium with Government Departments and oil companies in order to undertake this work. In addition, the research receives much help in kind from ferry operators, other marine research organisations and the Royal Navy.

In order to make available to those responsible for managing the oil industry the results of this project and those of related commissioned work on coasts, a special publication mapping vulnerable concentrations of birds for each month of the year was also produced for the North Sea. This is used by government in determining which areas to authorise for exploration and the conditions placed upon this, in timing sensitive operations by the industry, and in contingency planning. As to monitoring, there are difficulties in separating effects of this from other influences on the bird populations. However, NCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme and the national bird ringing scheme offer some possibilities.

Terrestrial conservation strategies

A major development to make use of bird data-sets to contribute to land-use planning over extensive areas concerns afforestation. Scottish Regional Councils are developing forest planting strategies in order to give guidance to the Forestry Commission and private forestry companies. These strategies consider the balance between forestry and other land-uses, such as agriculture, tourism and nature conservation. During the latter part of 1988, we were asked to comment on proposals from Strathclyde. Information, collated with the help of many local ornithologists and clubs, including SOC branches, was presented to Strathclyde Regional Council in a summary form with 10 × 10km squares being allocated to high, medium or low conservation value. This form of analysis meant that proper importance could be given to sensitive bird species without revealing localities. Information soundly based, but summarised in this way and at this scale, was also a most useful form for planners. Because of this detailed information, Strathclyde Region felt able to change the classification of about 13% of the Region's area to take further account of conservation interest. We are now advising several other Regions, including Grampian, Borders and Central, with our input being provided at earlier planning stages.

Nature conservation and low intensity agriculture on Islay

The island of Islay is remarkable for the variety of vulnerable and scarce bird species it supports. Both to maintain this interest in the face of potential change, and to explore lessons for improving areas damaged by agricultural intensification, we undertook a study of the relationship between Islay's birds and their habitats. Vegetation and land-use features were mapped on a sample of 1 × 1km national grid squares on the island and the information combined to describe a number of identifiable 'land-types'. Recording cards allowed systematic collection of bird observations, separately for breeding season records, nest records and winter records, throughout the island. These were then compared with the land-types on a 1 × 1km square basis.

Bird distributions were closely related to land-types, usually a combination of such types being required at different seasons. The land-type classification was based on vegetation and land-use. Therefore, one can

Turnstone *Steven Brown*

readily examine the likely effects of possible changes in land uses on birds and their habitats. In order to explain these analyses to the land managers and others, the formal descriptions of land-types and the possible changes to them were converted to pictures by a graphic illustrator. For example, land-type F is an intimate mosaic of low-intensity farmland and natural vegetation. Farmland is principally pasture, with smaller areas of cultivation for winter fodder. It includes some wooded farmland and small farms and crofts at the moorland edge. Agricultural intensification would produce landscape simplification, and would change both the character of the land and the associated birds. Changes of this type have occurred over much of Britain. The "tidying" of the landscape, drainage, and loss of field boundaries would cause losses of Corncrakes and Choughs, as well as breeding waders. Upper ground afforested by closely planted exotic conifers would be lost to open-country birds. The only vulnerable species apparently benefitting from the change is Barnacle Goose, but the changes would create a new conflict between farmers and this species.

A different scenario suggests how the landscape might look if agricultural and conservation incentives were incorporated. They would aim at maintaining the more traditional land-use, helping to sustain the less intensive farming methods, and would involve a conscious decision to sustain the wildlife interest. Field boundaries are repaired to maintain habitat for Corncrakes, Choughs and breeding waders. Out-buildings are repaired both to allow agricultural use and to make permanent the otherwise temporary use as Chough nest-sites. Retention of moorlands and the low intensity grazing land provide for birds of prey and Greenland White-fronted Geese. The area is enhanced by eventual replacement of the existing conifer plantations by native broadleaved trees. Farm income is diversified by providing for low-intensity natural history tourism.

Future developments

One major target of future development in our work (if it continues) will be to combine the national and regional approaches outlined earlier with the positive options resulting from the Islay study. We shall integrate monitoring schemes, including those for birds. By relating these and non-bird schemes to land-classification systems we shall have a common currency with some economists working on countryside policy incentives.

Acknowledgements

An overview of this nature depends heavily on help. I thank my colleagues in Ornithology Branch and elsewhere in NCC for their help well beyond the call of duty. Examples in this paper draw heavily on the work of Dr Eric Bignal, Dr Colin Galbraith, David Stroud, Mark Tasker, Andy Webb and NCC's Seabird Team; and work contracted by NCC to BTO, to Paisley College of Technology, and to the Seabird Group, as well as joint work with SOC branches and raptor groups, amongst others. As will have been evident, the success of the work overviewed in this article has depended on the happy partnership between many volunteer observers and the professional biologists employed to coordinate and analyse their efforts, and apply the results.

Mike Pienkowski

Jubilee Penguin Research

Edinburgh Zoo has kept penguins since 1914 and bred them since 1919. A new main penguin exhibit is needed and critical studies of the Gentoo, King and Rockhopper colonies are being made to improve conditions. From 90 Gentoos imported in 1947-63 the colony has produced a surplus of 300 for other zoos. The first King Penguins arrived on a Salvesen whaling ship in 1914, and the first chick was reared in 1919, so that 1989 was a 70th and a 75th anniversary. War-time problems led to the death of the last penguin in 1946 and colonies were re-founded from more Salvesen shipments in 1947-63. UK whaling then ceased and the colonies had to be self sustaining. There now are 80 Gentoos, 24 Kings and 22 Rockhoppers.

The competition to design the badly needed new penguin exhibit, organized with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, has attracted more than 350 enquiries. There is an evident need for critical studies of all three colonies before completion. With the Curator and Assistant Curator, I am writing the Gentoo population dynamics paper. Edmund Flach made a critical veterinary review of their mortality, and Kathy Byrne, a graduate student, is working on their DNA.

By 1979, all Gentoos were flipper banded and the annual records for each were stored on computer. There then were about twice as many females as males and this was gradually corrected; in 1979-80, 48% of females were in lesbian pairs or not breeding compared with 6% in 1988-89. Average age was also reduced. More than 70% of females first breed at the minimum age of two, and 98% in years 4-23, 13% of males first breed in year one, and 93% by year two. Comparing 1947-61 with 1979-89, adult mortality fell from about 36% to 8% for females and 5% for males. Eggs per laying female increased from about 1.3 in 1948-61, to 2.1-2.4 in 1984-9. Only about 50% hatch, due mainly to infertility, which varies greatly between individuals; older females rear 0-2.0 large chicks/year each, with differences almost wholly due to the proportion of eggs hatching. Chick losses fell from 58% in 1948-61, to 15% in 1988-9, up to about day 35. At that age they are removed to a nursery and hand-fed. This reduces loss of adults and chicks when birds try to rear two (wild Gentoos rarely do so), and reduces the spread of *Aspergillosis*. This air-borne fungus affects the lungs and is the main cause of adult and chick deaths.

In 1970-89, only about one-third of chicks reared were needed to maintain the colony, and the proportion is falling; between 1979 and 1989 the number of large chicks/female increased from 0.48 to 0.86. This is about the same as at wild colonies on South Georgia, from which most original Edinburgh birds came. More or less all the output of wild colonies is needed to maintain them. The very large Edinburgh surplus, which goes to zoos from Switzerland to Japan, must be due mainly to much lower immature and perhaps adult mortality, although earlier and more frequent breeding may be involved too. One of the most rewarding aspects of the Gentoo population study has been development of comparisons and co-operation with the work of British Antarctic Survey (BAS) penguin biologists.

When management was less advanced many newly imported birds died and the large

Gentoo Penguin *Susan da Prato*

surplus of females seems to date back to the 1960s. It follows that many of the 93-100 imported birds kept cannot have contributed to the present gene pool, which must be restricted to an unknown extent. Examination of the DNA profiles of all adults alive in 1989 should shed light on this.

Comparable studies of the much less successful Kings are not so advanced. Colony size has fallen from 44 to 24 in about 20 years. In the present enclosure egg losses are high from social interactions, and there has been a probably stressful loss of the inclination to swim. Breeding and longevity of wild-taken or first zoo generation Kings tended to be better, so that genetic diversity might be a problem, although there is no direct evidence of this yet. Another problem may be acceleration of life history events. Compared with wild Kings, sexual maturity, frequency of laying and of repeat laying, chick rearing and moult duration are or probably are all more frequent or rapid. Probably reduced lifespan thus may be associated with these suggestions of accelerated metabolism and this is worth investigation.

Good management has increased Rockhopper numbers. They pose some interesting questions. Like the other four *Eudyptes* species, they lay a relatively small A-egg (first egg) and a larger B-egg. The A-egg seldom hatches, and the chick is reared only if the B-egg doesn't hatch, or the B-chick soon dies. These penguins forage too far offshore to feed chicks often enough to rear both. This doesn't apply in zoos but they still rear only one. The A-egg is incubated in front of the B-egg. It gets so much less heat that it hatches later despite being laid first and having a smaller volume. In incubators quite different regimes may be appropriate for A- and B-eggs.

The two commonest *Eudyptes* are the smallest, the Rockhopper, and the largest, the Macaroni. In *Eudyptes*, the size difference between A- and B-egg increases with body weight, and the probability of the B-egg hatching decreases; B-eggs of wild Macaronis are very rarely known to hatch at all. Macaronis bred moderately well at Edinburgh about 30 years ago. With advances in management and new BAS studies of breeding biology in the wild to draw on, a self-sustaining Macaroni colony in the new exhibit should be feasible. This could be valuable, if captive breeding of the other, very much rarer, *Eudyptes* species was ever needed.

The Zoo is trying to improve on its already leading position as a supplier of captive bred penguins to others, to expand its role in research relevant to captive and wild penguins, and to promote knowledge and appreciation of these splendid birds which can help to generate public support for Antarctic conservation. Come and see them, and support your National Zoo's Penguin Appeal. For details write to the **Royal Scottish Zoological Society, Corstorphine, Edinburgh.**

Douglas Weir

Marsh and Willow Tits in the Borders

A recent article in *Scottish Wildlife* about the new SWT reserve at Pease Dean in Berwickshire carried a reference to Willow Tits excavating nest holes there in rotten tree stumps. Many readers will appreciate that only Willow Tit dig out nest-holes. Marsh Tits, in common with the other species of tit, seek out ready-made holes. However local ornithologists have only recorded Marsh Tits in Pease Dean and the SWT article turns out to be based on a mistake.

This is only the latest chapter in a long saga of confusion between the two species which are, it must be admitted, rather difficult to tell apart. Indeed it is only since 1900 that it was realised that there were two species involved and any reference to one of the Harvie-Brown faunal histories of Scotland lets one realise the confusion that existed about the precise status of the two species. This confusion was, and still is, most marked in the Borders where both species occur in mature deciduous woodland. This has led to a situation where all Willow Tit records in Borders require to be accompanied by a description if they are to stand any chance of being accepted. Naturally observers are loathe to describe birds that they know well but in order to ensure that posterity can have every confidence in the records published today a description is a necessity.

The Marsh Tit is the common member of the species pair in Borders, being widely distributed along the river system up to about 180m above sea level. Ancient deciduous woodlands along the rivers and the wooded policies of the large estates are the preferred habitat. The upstream limit of the distribution is Galashiels on the Tweed, Selkirk on the Ettrick, Hawick on the Teviot and Abbey St. Bathans on the Whiteadder. The wooded deans of coastal Berwickshire hold a small population that spills into similar situations in East Lothian towards Dunbar. It is possible that the Borders was colonised in the 1940s but I consider that the Willow Tits previously reported were in fact Marsh Tits and that there has been no change other than an extension of range into East Lothian. The status of Willow Tit is much less certain. There may be a small population on the Berwickshire coast along the Eye Water and small numbers are regularly seen at the Hirsel, near Coldstream. Occasional birds have been reported at Longformacus in the Lammermuirs. The reliable 1976 records of Willow Tit breeding to the south of Hawick probably involved birds that had moved from the Solway area over the watershed via Liddlesdale.

Marsh and Willow Tits in the Borders appear to be the northermost outliers of the populations that inhabit low ground in Northumberland. A similar situation exists on the west coast where Willow Tit extends northwards from Cumbria and the Solway into Scotland, reaching the central Clyde valley. These birds once occupied considerable parts of the Highlands but have apparently steadily declined since the start of the century.'

The best way of telling Marsh and Willow Tit apart is undoubtedly the voice. Unfortunately many birds are silent!

Ray Murray

Partly albino Capercaillie

During the course of hide observations at a Capercaillie lek in Craigvinean Forest near Dunkeld, Perthshire I saw an abnormally white cock Capercaillie. Observations were made on dusk through to morning watches from the evening of the 20th April to the morning of the 25th, 1984 in good light conditions, approaching to within a few metres.

White in the underparts extended to the metallic green pectoral shield. Demarcation between this white and the dark upper breast and throat was clearcut but irregular, white extending well up on the right and mid-ventrally. A few feathers near the transition zone appeared to be dark based with white tips. The white lower breast and flanks were scarcely flecked dark. Some grey feathers on the neck appeared unusually pale. There were a few white feathers on the throat; feathers of the legs, vent, undertail covets and tail were normally coloured. In dorsal view feathers of the inner edge of the wings, tertials and scapulars were white tipped, producing a bolder version of the pattern present to a variable extent in hen Capercaillies and occasionally partly developed in cocks that I have examined. The right wing showed an extensive area normally marked but of abnormally faded brown.

I considered the cock was immature on beak size, narrow rectrices and behaviour; for example sleaked feathers, watchfullness, association with hens and feeding in trees whilst other males were displaying on the ground. No calls were noted but on the 23rd the cock briefly raised and fanned its tail in display at about 5.32 am. There were then seven hens nearby attending a cock who mounted one at 5.28 and another at 5.39 am. The mornings when the piebald cock was observed coincided with high activity at the lek. Peak counts of hens simultaneously on the ground were eight on the 22nd, when a minimum of five cocks were seen, and seven on the 23rd.

The 1889 bird
J G Millais

Occasionally cock Capercaillies are seen with isolated white feathers about their head and neck probably originating from fight injuries. However, to my knowledge, the only previous report of a partly albino capercaillie in Scotland was of a cock killed in Ballathrie, Perthshire in 1889. The plumage of this cock was very similar but the white tips on the inner edge of the wing, tertials and scapulars appeared more marked in the Dunkeld bird. The whereabouts of the 1889 skin, probably sold in the Stevens sale of 1908, remains a mystery. The behaviour of the Dunkeld cock was similar to that of immature males observed visiting, but not establishing, territories at other leks in Scotland.

A.M. Jones

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Scottish Ringers 1989

Braemar and the Fife Arms Hotel once again provided Scottish ringers with an enjoyable November conference, with excellent talks, good food and good local birding. As usual some people assembled on the Friday night to show assorted slides of various birding activities since the previous year. Saturday morning saw the start of the talks, ably chaired by Henry Robb. The opening talk was an account of the bird life of Aldabra given by Robert Prys Jones. These islands contain not only many species of seabirds and shorebirds, notably frigates, noddies and Crab Plovers, but also some interesting passerines, including the rarest bird in the world, the Aldabran Brush Warbler.

Next to speak was Steve Moyes of Tay Ringing Group, with an account of the effect that management is having on the birds of the Tay reedbeds, some of the largest in Europe. Large areas of the reedbed (16% at present with a possible increase to 27.5%) are being harvested for roof thatching and species affected include hirundines, Sedge Warblers and Water Rails. The data being collected on such species will hopefully help to persuade commercial interests of the importance of these reedbeds for wildlife.

Mike Nicoll, also of TRG, then spoke of the group's 1988 trip to Svalbard in search of Purple Sandpiper nests. Staying in Norway, the next speaker was Rab Rae of the Grampian Group on their trip north in search of big females! Intrigued by the finding that in Britain most Purple Sandpiper catches have a skewed sex ratio (57% males despite chick sex ratio being 50-50), a journey to Norway to find big females proved irresistible but so far unsuccessful! The session was closed by Rick Smith who has been studying Snow Buntings on the coast and in the Cairngorms. This work is producing many interesting results concerning body condition and movements of birds between habitats as well as differential habitat utilisation by the age and sex classes.

The afternoon was spent watching Golden Eagles, Capercaillies, Black Grouse and Crossbills. The next talk was by Joe Conner of the Clyde Group, who have been studying Dippers on the Upper Clyde. Many of these Dippers nest in man-made sites such as the brickwork under bridges. These birds appear to be rather successful breeders. Paul Baker of TRG spoke of another Norway trip, this time looking at the weights of adult Little Stints during the breeding season. The study showed the sharp weight loss in parents once the chicks hatch.

Brian Etheridge of Highland Ringing Group has been working on Wigeon in the Moray Basin on behalf of the Wildfowl Trust, who are trying to gain information on their movements throughout the U.K. Ringing in the Moray Basin suggests that most of these birds come from Iceland and Russia and move on to England and Ireland. However, on the return journey, they do not return to the Basin but go straight back to the breeding grounds. The session was closed by Chris Mead with news of the 'definitely at some point' move to Thetford, ring prices and various other bits of BTO news, all greeted with scepticism traditional among Scottish ringers!

Saturday night's dinner was followed by a long night in the bar, including a cream cracker eating contest which featured Bernie Zonfrillo looking wonderful with a vacuum cleaner! An Australian couple, newly arrived in Scotland, felt completely at home as their only previous encounter with a Scotsman had been with Billy Connolly. They were particularly impressed by the community singing of the TRG male voice choir, spiritedly conducted by the SOC's new membership secretary Sylvia Laing.

Sunday morning began with Bob Swann's study of Buzzards in the Glen Urquhart area which he compared to Brian Etheridge's study in Morayshire. The Glen Urquhart birds have greatly reduced reproductive success, apparently due to the lack of rabbits. As a result they are forced to eat marginal prey items such as moles, voles and birds. Prey found at the nests has even included Wrens! Brian Little spoke of his data on Merlins on the edge of Kielder Forest. Until recently, many of these pairs were being crowded out by trees in newly planted areas. However some are now beginning to nest in old crow nests in the plantations. This, and the still decreasing levels of DDE in the eggs, means the population is showing encouraging signs of increase. The next talk was presented by Duncan Huggett, a PhD student who has been analysing nest box data on Northumberland Pied Flycatchers. Stuart Benn (RSPB) then spoke of the increasing threat to raptors from poisoning (see SOC Conference Report elsewhere in this issue).

The session was closed by Humphrey Crick of the BTO who is working on the analysis of nest record card data. He spoke of how some of the data, particularly on Peregrines and Hen Harriers, is showing interesting regional differences.

This year's conference had been ably hosted by Tay Ringing Group and proved to be an interesting and enjoyable weekend. We look forward to next year's conference which will be held on the same weekend at the same place and will be organised by Lothian Ringing Group.

Jennifer Gill

Rock Pipit *Steven Brown*

Birds and creels

While waiting for the ferry to North Uist on 9 July 1989 I walked along the pier at Uig on Skye. I was surprised to find six Rock Pipits caught in lobster creels (pots) stacked on the pier. I managed to release all six birds and they flew off, apparently no worse for their captivity. I wondered if this was a common ocurrence, and I would welcome any comment from anyone else who has recorded similar incidents. Is it widespread enough to cause problems if birds are kept away from their eggs or young in this way? It could be that the birds had been in the creels all night as the incident took place very early in the morning.

Derek McAlone

Wildlife cat is back

Wildlife at Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh will benefit from improvements being carried out by an aquacat. The aquacat, a floating excavator, is being used to clear 600 metres of channel in the sanctuary woodland. This is an area which is inaccessible to more conventional land diggers. The operation, lasting three weeks, is timed to coincide with the period of least disturbance to wildlife. The work is organised by the Scottish Wildlife Trust who advise the Scottish Development Department on the management of wildlife in the Royal Park.

By recreating open water within the woodland a greater variety of birds, animals and plants will be encouraged. The channels will also help protect the sanctuary from the vandalism which is a recurring problem in the area.

This work follows a similar project carried out two years ago at Duddingston. This involved cutting channels in the reed beds and improved the area for birds such as Grey Herons and Great Crested Grebes. The latest work will also encourage small mammals, such as water voles, as well as a greater variety of water plants. Improved drainage will also help stabilise the roots of the larger trees.

Duddingston Loch, which is part of Holyrood Park, is a noted site for wildlife in Edinburgh. The loch was declared a statutory bird sanctuary in 1925 and is an SSSI. So far the work has cost £5000.

Mixed pair of breeding Thrushes

On 22 May 1989, D. Maclemman and myself flushed a Mistle Thrush from a nest in the Pentland Hills, Lothian. The bird flew 20-30 metres, alarm calling, and had returned to the nest by our return to the site 15 minutes later. The nest contained four two-day old chicks and was sited on the ground among heather on the steep, rocky slope of a narrow valley. Situated in a very large area of open moorland and upland grazing land (the nearest cover being a small conifer plantation 500m away), the valley was typical breeding habitat for the species. I had previously often seen both Mistle Thrush and Ring Ouzel in the area.

I returned to the site on 29 May, intending to ring the young and was amazed to find a Song Thrush brooding them. This bird left the nest at my approach (taking a faecal sac with it) and performed a "broken wing" display nearby. The young, now partially feathered, resembled Song Thrush chicks and it was noted that the nest was lined with mud and a small fragment of eggshell below the nest was light blue, speckled black. One of the chick was lying, apparently freshly dead, below the nest. It was removed and frozen.

The implication of these observations is that the chicks were reared by a mixed pair. This record is also of interest in that the nest was in a very unusual site for Song Thrush: on the ground in an open, upland area. This was the first time I had observed Song Thrush at the site.

The nest was finally visited on 6 June by which time the nest was empty. A pile of droppings by the nest suggested a succesful outcome for the remaining three young. I would welcome any offers from keen biochemists to use the collected specimen to illuminate its genetic parentage!

C.C. McGuigan

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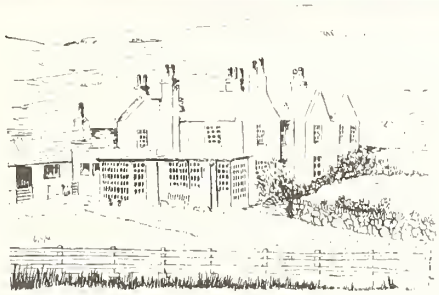

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £40.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £75.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £10 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Reviews

A Handbook to the Swallows and Martins of the World; *by Angela Turner & Chris Rose; Christopher Helm; 1989; 272pp. 24 col. plates 74 maps; £19.95.*

Angela Turner has put together the first comprehensive account of the Swallow family for over a hundred years and Chris Rose has prepared plates showing all 74 (or is it 75?) species. The book is in three main sections: an introduction to the biology and habitats of the family, followed by the plates plus distribution maps and then the main section with detailed descriptions of all species. There is a well chosen and substantial bibliography and an index. If you want to look up torpor, mortality or coloniality in swallows, however, a flick through the introductory and species accounts is necessary, because only species names are indexed. The introductory sections cover swallow morphology and plumage, classification, distribution and migration, food, foraging and competition, behaviour, breeding biology, population sizes and conservation and throughout these accounts are both succint and authoritative. The plates are a striking feature of the book; two to five species are illustrated on the right hand page, with distinctive juvenile plumages and flight patterns also shown. On the facing pages are distribution maps (seasonal differences are distinguished) accompanied by field-guide type descriptions of plumage and habits. While some of the illustrations impose an exaggerated grace (the compact Pacific Swallow is made to resemble the slender Red-rumped in flight for example), the quality is generally very high in the 'feather-perfect' style. The species accounts vary in extent according to the wealth of information available. The Swallow, called Barn Swallow here, has about five pages but the little known Congo Martin less than one. Angela Turner has done an outstanding job of seeking out the essentials of each species, much of it in obscure sources or unpublished, and covering everything from diets to voices, habitats to biometrics.

This is a very attractive and well produced book. It offers neither a guide to the finer points of field identification nor a light fireside read. What it does offer is the fullest account of the swallow family available. It is a library 'must' and a good buy for anyone with either a serious interest in swallows or a more general interest in our relatively neglected small birds.

David M Bryant

Best Days with British Birds; *edited by Malcolm Ogilvie & Stuart Winter; British Birds Ltd 1989; 192 pp; many line drawings; £14.95.*

This is an enjoyable small book, in which 34 personalities in the birding community describe their most memorable birdwatching experiences. The individual contributions are quite short, with an average of five pages and a maximum of ten. There are stories here to suit all tastes; even the twitchers are catered for. The most memorable for me were of an idyllic day spent on Hoy by Ian Prestt; of a remarkable day's birdwatching by David Glue despite being wheelchair bound; and Bernard King's account of a day watching wildfowl at Slimbridge. It has a twist in the tail very much against himself.

William Harper

The Wheatear *by Peter Conder; Christopher Helm; 1989; 328 pp; over 199 drawings, figures & maps; £19.95.*

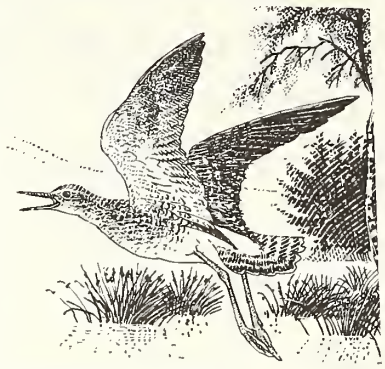
One species that many birdwatchers look forward to seeing in the Spring is the Wheatear. It is colourful, relatively common on migration and is usually the first passerine to return to northern countries from the heart of Africa. It breeds throughout northern Britain, albeit in a restricted habitat range, and still breeds in suitable areas further south. Any upland area that is sheep-grazed inevitably holds a small colony, as do coastal areas where the turf is short enough. As a result of being appointed warden on Skokholm, Peter Condor started what was to become a much longer study of this species that I suspect he anticipated at the time. The cumulative results of his studies have just been published in this monograph. This book is packed with detailed, often very detailed, observations. All aspects of the Wheatear's life are covered, including the long migrations taken in both spring and autumn and some aspects of its winter sojourn in equatorial Africa. However, the vast majority of the observations reported and discussed by the author are based on his own field work. The island of Skokholm may not represent the most typical breeding habitat of Wheatears in Britain, but having a population that has varied between 8 and 38 pairs in the last 60 years, and also suffering little disturbance from the general public, it proved to be an ideal site for this study. For purposes of comparison, observations from Dungeness and East Anglia are included, but there is a noticeable absence of any data from the upland areas of Britain where the majority of our Wheatears breed. The many aspects of the Wheatear's life are nicely depicted by John Busby's watercolours, but there are no photographs, not even monochrome. These would have been more than useful to the general reader in the discussion of the plumage differences of males and females of various ages – a pitfall for the unwary observer who relies on the standard guides. These are minor quibbles, however. This book is a fine example of what a serious amateur birdwatcher can achieve by concentrating on a single species over a long period of time. Having read the book once. I now feel that I am aware of many aspects of the Wheatear's breeding biology that I have missed over many summer days in the hills of southern Scotland. I look forward to reading it again and strongly recommend it to anyone who wishes to add another dimension to his or her upland birdwatching.

Lance L.J. Vick

The Birds of Lincolnshire and South Humberside; *by Stephen Lorand & Keith Atkin; Leading Edge Press; 1989; 224 pp; many b & w photos; £12.50.*

This is a model county ornithology, and a worthy successor to A.E. Smith & R.K. Cornwallis's "Birds of Lincolnshire" published in 1955. Two thirds of the book are a Systematic List, but this is more than a list; each species is given a well-written essay. There is a valuable description of the countryside and of its ornithological sites, a wide-ranging history of birds in Lincolnshire, and a seven-page bibliography.

William Harper



BIRDS AND FORESTRY

Mark Avery and Roderick Leslie
Foreward by David Bellamy

Recently the conflict between forestry and nature conservation has become a major environmental issue in Britain.The planting of large tracts of land with exotic conifers and the resulting disturbance of existing plant and animal communities has polarized the debate, each camp believing that it has the most rational view.
In this book an ornithologist and a forester have combined their skills to tackle the issues in a forthright manner. This represents a significant step towards achieving the sort of prudent land planning that will really improve our beleaguered countryside.

ISBN: 0.85661.058.5, c.325 pp, £17.50 (tentative), April 1990

THE MANX SHEARWATER

Michael Brooke

The Manx Shearwater must rank amongst the world's most evocative seabirds.This book describes the breeding biology, vocal behaviour, transequatorial migrations and population dynamics of the bird in detail. Delightful vignettes by Dafila Scott complete this enthralling book.

ISBN: 0.85661.057.7, c. 260 pp, £17.50 (tentative), March 1990

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SOC News

1989 Annual Raffle

We would like to thank everyone involved in last year's raffle for their help, generosity and support. We received £2183, including £300 in donations. After deducting expenses of £275 (£100 1st prize; £152 printing; £13 annual registration fee, and £10 postage) a net **£1908** was raised for club funds.

We thank particularly all those who made a donation, and branches which kindly gave a prize; together with those from individual members and firms, they made up an excellent selection for the draw. Prizes were distributed directly after the conference and a list of prizewinners was sent to all Branch Secretaries last November. Anyone wanting a list should send an s.a.e. to the Club Secretary.

During the three years we have organized the raffle a total of £4054 has been raised for club funds. We feel that this not only demonstrates the value of an annual raffle in financial terms, but shows that members are keen to give their support in this way. Those attending the Annual Dinner always enjoy the draw made after the speeches.

The 1990 raffle is to be organized by the Tayside Branch, and we wish it every success. We will give it all the help we can, and we are sure that all members will do so as well. One way that would be most welcome is for every Branch to donate a prize, possibly with a local flavour or connection. Thank you for all your generous support these past three years.

Borders Branch Committee

200 Club

While there was a good boost to membership at the Conference, there is still plenty of room for new members. So far £210 has been given out in prizes, but they have had to remain modest at present. The winners in the last quarter of 1989 (£20 1st, £10 2nd) were:

October: Mrs J.D. Watson, St John's Town of Dalry, and Miss R.M. GLen, Edinburgh.

November: D.C. Thorne, West Linton, and R. Caine, Eyemouth.

December: B.A. Brown, Edinburgh and T.C. Johnson-Ferguson, Canonbie.

Members will know that almost half of the 200 Club subscriptions go to the refurbishment of the Club premises. Because of all the discussions about our future home, it is worth reminding everyone that wherever our Club premises are in future, refurbishment of some sort will always be needed whether it be carpets, furniture, painting or something similar. By joining the 200 Club you can help the SOC in a very practical way, as well as giving yourself a chance to win a prize. Do please join; write to me for details at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NL (tel. Melrose 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

German Contact

29 year old German couple, teacher and advocate by profession, mature and Scotland loving, engaged in nature conservation, are looking for contacts with people all over Scotland; conversation in English or German. Please do not hesitate to write to: **Christiane Kollner-Kruger, Ralf M Kruger, Sangelsrain 24, D-3500 Kassel.**

Lothian members help again

As most readers know the magazine and other enclosures are put into envelopes by patients at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. This happened at the end of November as usual. However *Scottish Birds* didn't arrive at Regent Terrace until mid December. The only way we could get it added to the envelopes and into the mail before Christmas was to ask Peter Gordon to call on his band of volunteers. This he did but the combination of a flu epidemic and icebound roads – it was December 14th, the day Edinburgh slithered to a halt – meant that only Graham Appleton, Keith Chapman, Calum Scott and Peter himself made it to the Club where the last envelope was stuffed around 10 pm. Sincere thanks to all of them.

Save the Cairngorms

The President has written on behalf of the Club objecting to plans to put downhill ski facilities in or near to the Northern Corries. The background to all this was given in previous *SBN*s. We stress we are not against all ski developments and welcome those such as the recently opened facility at Aonach Mor which was installed without any conflict with conservationists.

Irish Whitefronts

Scotland and Ireland are important wintering areas for geese from Greenland, including the relatively rare Greenland race of the White-fronted Goose. We were, therefore, concerned to learn that the Irish government intends to allow shooting on the important Wexford refuge. Allan Brown, who chairs the Surveys & Research Committee, has written to protest on behalf of the Club.

Levens leaving

Recent news coverage of Hong Kong has concentrated on how many people might want to leave the place. Lothian Branch stalwarts Liz and Mike Leven are going against the trend by moving there this month. We understand work is the official reason but suspect Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Nordmann's Greenshank may have something to do with it. Liz and Mike have done a great deal for the SOC as branch office-bearers, outings organisers, local bird report editors etc and we are sorry to lose them.

1990 WWT/BTO/SOC National Mute Swan Census

This is to take place during the 1990 breeding season with the aims of:

1. Estimating population changes since the 1983 census and describing their geographical pattern, particularly in relation to the ban on the use of lead weights by anglers, a problem associated more with England than Scotland.
2. Estimating the current size of local and national populations.
3. Providing a baseline for future monitoring.

In 1983 a complete census was attempted and coverage in Scotland was good, producing an estimated 3250 birds (*Scott. Birds 13*: 5). The 1990 census will follow similar methods as 1983 with breeding pairs surveyed on a 10km square basis during April/May and non-breeding flocks during April. It is hoped that full coverage can be obtained throughout Scotland and that conflict with the final year of fieldwork for the New Atlas can be minimised by the timing of the survey. However, a system of random squares has been devised to be covered in a selected order and from which an extrapolation can be made for squares not covered. It must be emphasised that this is no substitute for full coverage.

As in 1983 we have agreed to co-ordinate the organisation of this survey in Scotland. If you would like to participate either contact your Regional Organiser or us and we will forward your name to the relevant organiser or suggest areas where help may be required. We will be pleased also to receive any data on individual swan breeding/flock observations in Scotland in 1990 and information on any on-going studies that may be taking place of which we are not aware. In addition any sightings of colour-ringed birds would be appreciated.

We hope that as many SOC members as possible can take part in this survey. The Mute Swan is a very public bird; SOC Council has agreed to the Club co-organising the survey; let us have the fullest possible coverage – surely this can be achieved for a bird as obvious as a swan? **Allan and Lyndesay Brown, 232 Rullion Road, Penicuik, Midlothian EH26 9JL.**

Aberdeen: A. Webb, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE. **Angus:** K. Slater, 71 Patrick Allen Fraser St, Arbroath DD11 2LX. **Argyll:** S. Newton, 87 Cleuch Drive, Alva, Clackmannanshire. **Arran, Bute & Cumbrae:** D. Warner, Castle Cottage, Brodick, Isle of Arran KA27 8HY. **Ayrshire:** B.D. Kerr, 95 Portland Street, Troon KA10 6QN. **Benbecula & The Uists:** P.R. Boyer, 10 Baile Na Cille, Balivanich, Western Isles PA88 5ND. **Borders:** Mr A.T. Bramhall, 28 Blakehope Court, Tweedbank, Galashiels. **Caithness:** E.W.E. Maughan, Burnside, Harbour Road, Reay, Thurso KW14 7RG. **Central Scotland:** M.E. Phillips, Pitsulie Cottage, Shiresmill, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 8ER. **Dumfries:** P. Shimmings, WWT, Caerlaverock, Dumfries. **Fife & Kinross:** N. Elkins, 18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 4DX. **Inverness (E & Spey):** R.L. Swann, 14 St Vincent Rd, Tain, Ross, IV19 1JR. **Inverness (W):** D.S. Whitaker, Clunes, Achnacarry, Spean Bridge. **Islay, Jura & Colonsay:** M. Ogilvie, Glencairn, Bruichladdich, Isle of Islay, Argyll PA49 7UN. **Kincardine & Deeside:** R.M. Laing, 87 Johnston Gardens East, Peterculter, Aberdeen AB1 0LA. **Kirkcudbright:** Miss J.E. Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, DG7 3UW. **Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbarton:** J.J. Sweeney, 44 Newton Avenue, Barrhead, Glasgow G78 2JY. **Lewis & Harris:** C. Reynolds, 50 Strouden Avenue, Bournemouth. **Lothians:** A.W. & L.M. Brown, 232 Rullion Road, Penicuik EH26 9JL. **Moray & Nairn:** M.J.H. Cook, Rowanbrae, Clochan, Buckie, Banffshire AB5 2EQ. **Orkney:** C.J. Corse, Garrisdale, Lynn Park, Kirkwall KW15 1SL. **Perthshire:** R.E. Youngman, Atholl Bank, East Moulin Road, Pitlochry PH16 5HY. **Rhum, Eigg, Canna & Muck:** R.L. Swann, 14 St Vincent Rd, Tain, Ross IV19 1JR. **Ross:** A.D.K. Ramsay, Hardanger, Coulnagour, By Culbokie. **Shetland:** J.D. Okill, Heilinabretta, Cauldhame, Tronda ZE1 0XL. **Skye:** A. Currie, Glaiseilean, Harrapool, Broadford, Skye IV49 9AQ. **Sutherland:** G. Bates, 105 Strathy Point, Strathy KW14 7RY. **Wigtown:** G. Sheppard, The Roddens, Leswalt, Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway DG9 0QR.

SOC Notices

Water Rail Census

We are carrying out a census of the number of breeding Water Rails in Angus, Perthshire and Fife. If you have heard or seen any Water Rail in these areas or know of any sites where Water Rail are likely to be present please send us details of the location; the name and map reference if possible. **Derek Robertson, 61 Clepington Ct, Dundee DD3 7QF (0382) 457414. Steve Moyes, 1st Floor, 8 Grays Lane, Lochee, Dundee (0382) 612643.**

BORIS becomes MABEL

The former Bookshop Computer System has had a sex change. BORIS which stood for Bookshop Ordering Retrieval & Information System has turned into MABEL: Membership and Branch Electronic Listing. We are grateful to Liz and Mike Leven for carrying out the conversion and Alastair Peirse-Duncombe for the new acronym. The new system is a vast improvement on the increasingly temperamental BBC micro computer that used to hold membership details. We now have a much more accurate picture of how many members we have and how they are distributed. In January 1990 there were:

Family	203
Adult	1488
Pensioner Family	111
Pensioner	401
Junior/Student	78
Life	91
Honorary	12
Total memberships	2384

This figure is **not** directly comparable with previously published figures where an estimate was made for the number of people in a family which the computer "sees" as one membership. If we ignore children and consider Family memberships as two adults a conservative estimate of the SOC is 2698 members.

Branch secretaries should have received lists of members for their areas by the time you read this.

Ayrshire	107	Borders	78
Caithness	50	Clyde	226
Dumfries	86	Fife	136
Grampian	130	Highland	148
Lothian	447	Stewartry	42
Stirling	86	Tayside	151
West Galloway	57		

Not least of the advantages of MABEL is that the Membership Secretary needs to spend less time with it than its predecessor, allowing her to do other things in the office.

Sylvia Laing

Membership Secretary

A notice should have appeared in the last issue of *SBN* advising members of the appointment of a new membership secretary. Sylvia Laing joined the staff last September and has settled in well despite starting at one of the Club's busiest times. She has already publicised the SOC on *MacGregor's Gathering* on Radio Scotland. Sylvia is an active member of the Club and also a member of the Tay Ringing Group, but we don't hold that against her. Besides keeping membership details up to date she deals with conference bookings and is taking over as Business Editor of this magazine. She is the main point of contact between members and the Club's administration.

Double Payments

It has been noticed that a number of banks are still paying the old subscription rate to us as well as the new rate. I am trying to sort this out; perhaps if your bank has paid your subscription twice you could get in touch with me!

Sylvia Laing, Membership Secretary

Funds for the Atlas

The Atlas Fund Raising Committee has been continuing its work over the past year and now is working to raise the oustanding balance required of about £4,500. In the course of recent months particular support has been forthcoming from the Carnegie University's Trust, Shell U.K., The Robertson Trust and many of the top 100 Scottish Companies who responded to our Appeal for £100. Ian Darling would be particularly pleased to hear from any members who have ideas on fund raising, especially those with knowledge of Charitable Trusts who might be willing to support the Appeal. He can be contacted c/o 21 Regent Terrace or at **West Acres, 579 Lanark Road West, Balerno, Edinburgh EH14 7BL.**

Deeds of Covenant

In 1988/89 the SOC received £4116 from the Inland Revenue, a welcome source of income which enables the club to maintain its services to members. What is particularly significant about this sum is only the Chancellor of the Exchequer feels the loss! If you pay income tax, you can help contribute to the club's income at no expense to yourself. All you need do is complete a Deed of Covenant form, available from 21 Regent Terrace, and the club will claim back from the Revenue the tax you have paid on your subscription. You lose nothing! Please give this matter your serious consideration.

Small ads

BIRD BOOKS FOR SALE. Telephone (0875) 811094.

RESULTS OF INTENSIVE SEA WATCHING IN SW KINTYRE, AUTUMN 1989 by E J Maguire & R A C Angus; 51 pp; £4 from Maguire, Sabaid, Glebe St, Campbelltown, Argyll.

RU'A REIDH LIGHTHOUSE, GAIRLOCH – stay at the remote Keeper's Cottages, this spring. Ideal for coastal birds. B&B £7.50, E/M £3.50. Residential activity courses also available. Tel: 0445 85 263 for details.

Clyde area bird information

Alan Wood has generously offered to be the contact person for this area. His number is (STD Code: 050 587) 3576.

Sales Items

All prices include P&P, except overseas who should add £1.50. Please make cheques, Postal Orders payable to "SOC" at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).

SOC Sweatshirts, Navy (S,M,L)	£10.50
SOC Tie. (Navy, Maroon, Dark Green)	£ 5.95
SOC Badge	£ 3.50
SOC Car Sticker	£ .75
Keith Brockie Eagle Print (limited stock)	£20.00
SOC Field List	£ .75
SOC Checklist	£ 1.25

Experienced birdwatchers wanted

Come and join dozens of excellent birdwatchers from all over the world, observing the most abundant autumn migration route from Eurasia to Africa! About ½ million raptors, 200,000 White Storks and 70,000 White Pelicans migrate over Israel during this period! More than 30 raptor species are identified each survey, as well as many other migrating species. The survey has been organized for 11 years by the Israel Raptor Information Center (IRIC). Volunteers are located along a cross section of Israel, at 17 observation points from the Mediterranian Sea to the Rift Valley. You will live at one of the Kibbutzim in the area and get free lodging and food. You will have to cover your ticket to Israel. **Minimum participation is one month, sometime between 1 August-20 November 1990.**

If you are an experienced birdwatcher, capable and willing to watch migration for not less than 8 hours a day, please write with details to **Shlomit/Autumn Survey, IRIC, Har-Gilo, Doar-Na Zfon Yehuda, Israel 90907, Fax: 072-2-761183.**

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 April for the June number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult £12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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Birds

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Assisted by Mike Ashley
and Sheila Horsburgh

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Morrich More

On the south shore of the Dornoch Firth, just to the east of Tain, lies a great diamond shaped area of sand and gravel 4km by 7km. It was deposited at the end of the last glaciation and ever since has been washed by the sea and sifted by the wind to form a vast area of parallel dune ridges and slacks slowly eroding on its western shore and building to the north-east. This is the Morrich More.

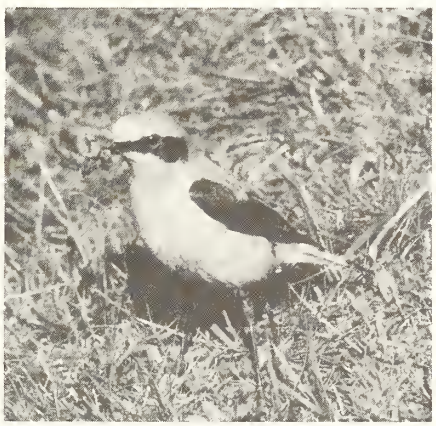
Over 1700ha. in extent this is the fourth largest dune system in Great Britain. Due to its large area, its regular dune and slack system, associated parabolic dunes, offshore bar islands, salt marshes and sand flats the area is considered to be one of the most important and distinctive dune systems in Europe. It is therefore designated an internationally important SSSI for physiographic reasons.

Over 200 plant species have been recorded in the complex of communities associated with such a large and varied system. There is a marked northern influence on the coastal vegetation. Arctic-alpine species such as Mountain Everlasting and Hoary Whitlowgrass occur in close proximity to typical sand dune and saltmarsh plants. The northern influence is more noticeable to the non-specialist in the extensive areas of Juniper along with the heathers on the drier ridges. From the point of view of the botanist the Morrich More is a nationally important SSSI.

Bird populations

As might be expected from such a complex of habitats the Morrich More has a large and varied bird population reflecting both the northern influence and the amelioration of the sea in its composition. Here the windswept Juniper has Twite breeding close by Linnets from the nearby farmland, one of the few places in Scotland where the two breed in the one area. It is however, mild enough for Stonechat to survive the coldest of recent winters.

The major ornithological interest of the Morrich More is as a breeding area for waders, and as a passage and overwintering area for wildfowl and waders. In summer there are very high densities of breeding Redshank, Curlew and Snipe along with a number of other species. In winter the sand flats, saltmarshes and associated bays hold high populations of Wigeon and Teal, and many waders, especially Bar-tailed Godwit and Knot. At times up to 1000 Greylags feed and roost on the saltings and in summer a similar number of Sandwich Terns have nested. In the recent past it also held a flock of up to 40 Greenland Whitefronts in winter. Regrettably both the terns and Whitefronts have dwindled to very small numbers recently.



Male Wheatear by the late William Brotherston. William was an Honorary Member of the SOC whose special interests were moorland birds and geese. He organised goose counts in South East Scotland for many years. We have just learned that Mrs Helena Brotherston has generously given the Club £1,000 in memory of her husband.

In autumn the flocks of waders on the bay, and Twite and pipits on the grassland attract many raptors; it is quite possible to see Merlin, Peregrine, Kestrel, Buzzard and Hen Harrier on the land, and a migrant Osprey fishing in the bay. For these many and varied ornithological reasons the Morrich More is considered internationally important as an SSSI.

Bombing range

With all the above attractions why is the Morrich More not one of the ornithological meccas of the Highlands? The answer is it is also one of the largest bombing ranges in Europe. This has been both the making and the downfall of the Morrich More. The very restricted access necessitated by bombing has ensured that, despite the roar of passing jets, bird populations have been relatively undisturbed. On its landward side much of the former sandflat area was utilised as an airfield during the last war and has since been converted to agricultural land while, apart from sheep grazing, the main SSSI areas are untouched. The sand dune areas are also largely unused. Elsewhere in the Moray Firth the bird populations might well have been replaced by populations of caravans in the summer.

Planning permission

The relatively unknown status of the Morrich More has also been its downfall for in 1986 Land and Marine Engineering Ltd. applied for planning permission to construct a pipeline assembly area, with a 5km "roadway" for the assembly of long line pipeline bundles for the oil industry. While this was accepted by Highland Regional Council, the Secretary of State called in the application, and in September 1986 a public enquiry was held in Tain. The development was strongly opposed by the NCC, the RSPB, the SWT, local fishing interests and a number of local groups and individuals. It was supported by the council on the grounds of providing local employment. The recorder at the enquiry found for the development, but, due to the environmental impact, stated that work could not begin on the area until the company had secured a contract. As the Morrich More is relatively unknown nationally there was not the public outcry that there might have been had it been situated in the central belt.

In January of this year Land and Marine announced that they had been awarded a contract by Shell UK to build a pipeline. Despite last minute attempts to stop the development, neither the company nor the Secretary of State were prepared to reconsider. At the time of writing the roadway for pipeline construction is entering the main wader breeding areas at the back of the salting to the east of the sand flats. Later this year the company will bulldoze a passage through one of the bar islands to float out the pipe. The island will then be restored by bulldozing the sand back into the hole! The company claim that the roadway will affect only a 20m corridor through the sandflats and salting, but it is probable that the water flow below the system will be radically changed, producing an effect over a much greater area.

How many jobs?

Will the development bring the claimed 80 local jobs? It may well make some difference locally, but, as the Highlands can probably not support three such facilities, this may well be at the expense of existing jobs in Wick or Evanton. It seems ironic that Shell, who claim to be building a "Better Britain", should combine with a government which claims to be environmentally sensitive to radically alter a unique habitat in the north of Scotland.

David McAllister

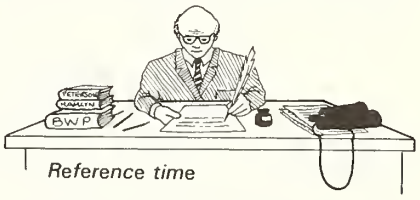
Catching them young

Edinburgh has had quite a reputation for the enthusiasm of its young ornithologists. It is now history that the group of boys who, in the years between the wars, formed the Inverleith Field Club and later the Midlothian Ornithological Club allowed their infectious enthusiasms to spill over into what was to be called the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. Since the war, the R.S.P.B. has been a source of inspiration to youngsters anxious to pursue an interest in birdlife. With George Waterston at 17 Regent Terrace, much of the Y.O.C. local activities were based there, especially in the late sixties. It was an exciting time for those involved, the only problem being a lack in continuity in the early seventies when George's excellent assistants seemed to be subject to sudden and rapid promotion elsewhere. In 1974, at the same time as the R.S.P.B. Members' Group was formed, the Edinburgh Y.O.C. Group was set up. Since 1974 Malcom Porteous has co-ordinated the activities of the Edinburgh Group which now has the reputation of being one of the most successful in Britain – here he tells us how he does it.

In no way can I take the credit for ever creating a master plan which explains the success the group has had over the years. I was involved in a much smaller way in local Y.O.C. activities before 1974 and all I did was to build on an obviously successful system which was already operating. The plan, such as it is, involves some indoor meetings, not too many, most of the time being spent out of doors looking at birds. We try to make it easy for newcomers to join us, and try to give a good basic introduction, the wonderful variety of habitats within reach of Edinburgh being a special bonus here. After that it has simply been a matter of responding to the enthusiasms and ideas of the members themselves.

Leaders contributions

I have been lucky in having an excellent team of leaders, around a dozen at any one time. Some have been interested adults who have volunteered, in some cases a son or daughter who has been a member has provided the initial contact. Some leaders are simply older members while certain reserve wardens or rangers have become closely involved. The number of leaders available means that we can have lots of outings, something pretty well every weekend as well as on summer evenings and through-out holidays. Since 1974 our newsletters indicate almost 1200 meetings! Our leaders seem to fit into the pattern very happily although several of them play little part in overall planning. I sometimes wonder about trying to change this but the leaders seem to be content and concentrate on the bird-watching.



Reference time

This system has the advantage that it makes the members feel that it is their club, not something organised for them by adults. We keep parents in their place! Actually this place is an extremely important one. I make the point that if too many parents come along we find that outings are for groups of adults with children tagging on. A few are fine and any who do turn up are always made welcome. Their friendship over the years is something, on a personal basis, I have appreciated enormously.

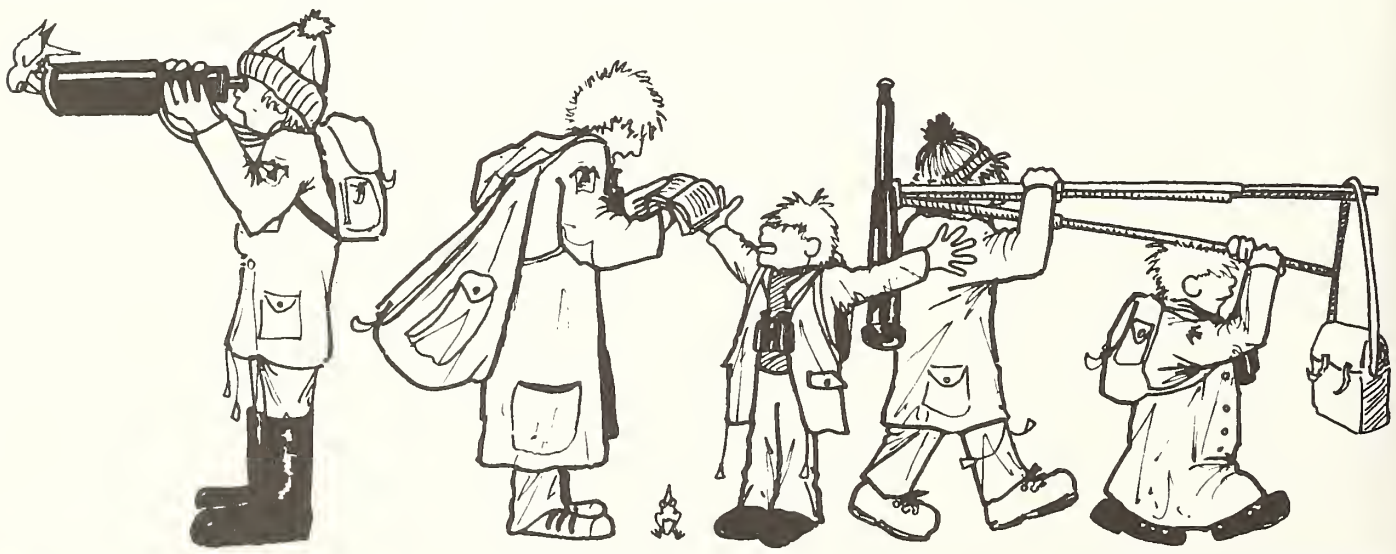
Members' enthusiasm

The enthusiasm of the members has been the most significant thing over the years especially when marked by a willingness to put back in as well as take out. This aspect was very noticeable in the early days and has been so again in recent years. Perhaps in the middle years there was something of a doldrum period but then things always do seem to go in cycles. Extended trips have been available to those who have proved their ability to maintain an interest over a longer period and are ready to practice a few essential social skills! We have been to Norfolk no less than fourteen times, Speyside eight times, Islay and the Uists four times each and various other places including, for a glorious Easter fortnight in 1977, Majorca.

For those who are not quite so crazy about adding to their bird lists there are opportunities for conservation work with monthly visits to Vane Farm. Those who like to mix their birds with the wild outdoors have ample opportunity through the very close relationship we have with Torquil Johnson-Ferguson, who runs the ultimate in youngsters' adventure courses on his island at Ru'a Fiola.

Of course the test of a real ornithologist, young or otherwise, is their depth of knowledge, not just the number of species they have ticked off. While the latter activity does, yes, take place (and occasionally journeys have been made for no other purpose!) members have participated in surveys. Some of these have been of our own devising like the Water of Leith Survey, which we have now done on three occasions. Others include Wildfowl and Estuary counts and Atlas work, both national and local.

One of the most exciting aspects of work with young people is the stage when you see them standing on their own feet. Yes, YOCs no longer needing the YOC. How gratifying that they realise that we might still need them. The older members get up to all sorts of things which I don't necessarily hear about till later. Almost more than anything our Edinburgh Group brings together youngsters who otherwise would never have met, and who would have missed out on the opportunity to share their interest with a kindred spirit. They organise themselves and off they go. I have lost track of all the places they have been to but, judging from the number of references I have written for grant applications, Fair Isle has been a destination for many.


Cartoons by John Gibson

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Post juvenile dispersal

Once Edinburgh youngsters leave school many of them move away as further education or jobs direct. Quite a few have studied Ecology, or a related subject, and, in some cases, have become involved in projects which have taken them to various parts of Africa, to Borneo, New Guinea, Belize and Ecuador. Several are involved with rangering or wardening. Most have moved into different fields altogether but many have maintained a keen interest and some of their names are now appearing in ornithological publications. The artistic skills of several have graced several local bird reports and the Scottish Bird Report.

Looking forward and looking back

What of the future? Nationally the Y.O.C. is set for change the nature of which is still uncertain. The need to recruit more youngsters could lead to attempts to create a more popular image, more fun laid on, playing at ornithology rather than close encounters with the real thing. In Edinburgh even our youngest members tend to get a fairly adult approach from the start so they see it as something to stick with rather than something to grow out of. Many members do, of course, drift away but generally because they are just not that interested anyway, not because they have found it too childish. I will be guided by the members and we will evolve with caution. It is a good principle never (well hardly ever) to lay on "fun" for children. Make life a bit of a challenge, bird watching is that anyway, and they will get far more satisfaction out of it that way and in the end far more fun!

Looking back it recently struck us how many people have been involved in the Group and how many stories there must be to tell. We have decided to gather together as much as possible and publish it. We intend to approach people with even longer memories than us to fill in the story of what went on in the first years of the Y.O.C. and even earlier. I would be very happy to hear from anybody who feels that they can contribute material, especially in the last category. What exactly did youngsters get up to in the twenties and thirties? And if anyone wants to share some of the fun of what young ornithologists get up to nowadays there is always scope for the occasional new leader. My address is: **3 Hermitage Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 6DL.**

Malcolm Porteous

The RAF Ornithological Society

The society which has 450 members scattered from Hong Kong to the Falklands celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. It is well represented in Scotland and in 1989 a team spent two weeks in rugged terrain in the West Highlands, assisting with survey work for the New Atlas of Breeding Birds. Over two hundred tetrads were censused in late spring, and at the same time data was collected for the RSPB's survey of breeding Hen Harriers. In addition, sightings of aquatic birds were reported to the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust. A similar expedition will be mounted in Ross and Cromarty in 1990, when, in addition to the New Atlas survey, information will be collected on Black-throated Divers for the RSPB and on Mute Swans for the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust.

Other Scottish expeditions in recent years have been to Shetland, Berneray and Mingulay, the Uists, North Rona, St Kilda and the Isle of May. Bird ringing has always been an important aspect of the Society's activities, and ringing is included in all expeditions wherever possible.

One of the most important activities of the Society is to encourage its members to compile dossiers of the wildlife, and especially the birds, on each RAF Station. This work is valued by the Ministry of Defence Conservation Officer and by local and national wildlife societies, who do not normally have access to what are often rich and valuable sites. During the 1989 spring, RAFOS members carried out a brief survey of the birds on 55 RAF Stations and recorded over 150 species, of which about 75% were breeding. Society members are also compiling RAFOS Site Dossiers on the majority of RAF Stations which will record bird activity throughout the year. This data should form a basis to allow MOD Conservation Groups to identify Conservation Management Projects for the future.

Sqdr Ldr Peter Montgomery

Birds and creels

A few years ago my neighbour in Badcall called me over to see a "strange bird" caught in a creel. It was a male Sparrowhawk, unharmed but not very pleased, apparently having entered in pursuit of a small bird which had itself escaped. I have also seen a Blackbird in a creel and Victor Anderson, Reay Forest head stalker, tells me that he once saw, at Dundonnell, a Peregrine caught in a creel while chasing a Blackbird.

Ian D. Pennie

Small birds often go into creels in search of food and are unable to escape if the door is closed. The solution, of course is to leave the door open. It may be of interest to report that I twice found a Dipper in a creel which I had modified as necessary to trap trout for stripping. Fortunately the birds both survived because the top of the creel was above water.

Capt. D.E.P. George

We do not anticipate publishing further records of what are clearly not infrequent events unless they are particularly unusual.

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What does global warming mean for our birds?

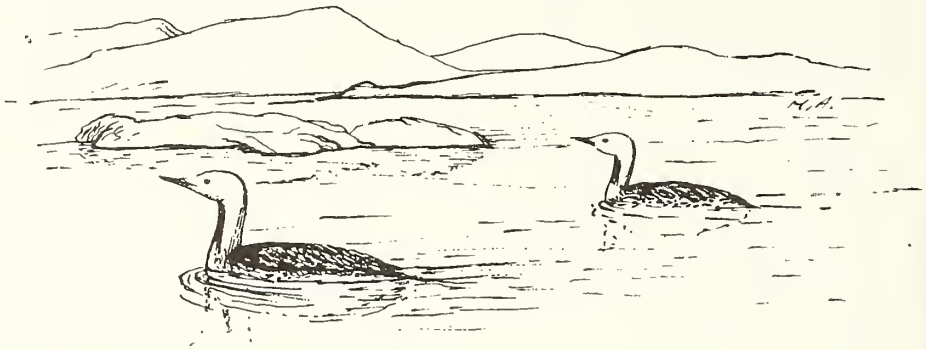
Most readers will have heard of an issue that has made even the politicians green, if not with genuine environmental concern, at least with a healthy concern about where their votes are likely to come from in future. But what exactly is global warming? Is it really going to happen? If it does what effect will it have on our bird populations? Professional meteorologist and Club member Norman Elkins looks into his crystal ball for us.

When the editor asked me to put pen to paper on this subject, I realised that anything I wrote would inevitably be controversial, particularly with regard to predictions. There has rarely been general agreement among climatologists on whether climatic variability has increased or decreased, but the growing awareness of man's possible modification of the state of the atmosphere by pollution has led to considerable concern. So much so that a number of the world's leading meteorological authorities are now engaged in computer modelling to discover what would transpire if artificial global warming does take place. What follows here is not definitive, but rather a reflection on what could happen if predictions come true and the human population on our planet takes no action.

The problem

Firstly, let us look more closely at the emotive term 'greenhouse effect'. We must put things into perspective by realising that were it not for the natural gases of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and water vapour, which are an integral part of the biosphere despite their very low concentration in the atmosphere (CO_2 has a concentration of 0.035%), the temperature at the earth's surface would be some 33°C lower than it is, and life would not be possible. This is because of the greenhouse effect, caused by an imbalance between the incoming short-wave radiation from the sun and the outgoing long-wave radiation from the earth. As the CO_2 and water vapour absorb some of the latter and re-radiate it back to earth, there is a net gain of heat energy in the atmosphere. What we are concerned about is the enhancement of the natural greenhouse effect by the current increase in CO_2 concentrations brought about by the burning of fossil fuels and the widespread destruction of forests. To this must be added other, and even more significant, 'greenhouse' gases such as methane and CFCs. Since pre-industrial times, the CO_2 concentration has risen by 25%, with a rise of 11% alone in the past three decades.

During the earth's history, there have been major fluctuations in CO_2 due to natural causes, and from ice cores in Antarctica we know that these fluctuations are highly correlated with temperature changes. Clearly, if the concentrations of greenhouse gases continue to increase, then there is a threat of atmospheric warming on a global scale. We do not know by how much, or even if, the biosphere can counteract this warming, nor do we know if the oceans can modify it, since they absorb large amounts of CO_2 Recent fluctuations in the temperature of the tropical oceans have indeed become more marked, but the causes remain unclear.



Red-throated Divers *Mike Ashley*

The future

It is against this background of the complexity of atmospheric change that attempts are being made to predict future trends. At present we have no incontrovertible evidence to suggest that the recent storminess or mild winters in Britain, and the greater climatic variability in general, are due to excess greenhouse gases. Certainly the atmosphere has warmed, but this has happened before as part of the natural variability of climate. Another two or three decades of close monitoring will be required before we can acknowledge if the variations are natural or man-induced. A further problem arises when predictions assume that greenhouse gases will continue to increase and warm the atmosphere, as the effects shown by various computer models vary, and are by no means evenly distributed over the planet. Even observed trends are very uneven.

Let us suppose that the recent global warming is due to these man-made (anthropogenic) materials, and assume that the increase in greenhouse gases continues at the same or greater rate in the future. An expected doubling of the concentrations during the next century will lead to a global rise in temperature of anything between 1.5°C to 5°C, with the greatest increase in polar regions. The resultant melting of ice will put more moisture into the atmosphere, with greater cloudiness and precipitation. However, the former may then reduce solar radiation receipt at the earth's surface, while the latter may add more snow and counteract ice melt; these and other feedbacks are impossible to quantify but may reduce warming. The ice melt and the expansion of the oceans by global warming will raise sea levels. Current predictions are that the sea level will rise by a very approximate 20cm in the next 40 years, and perhaps at a faster rate thereafter, as the warming of the oceans will lag behind the rise in CO_2 levels. Even if these forecasts come true, regional differences will mean that temperature changes, precipitation and sea levels will be even more difficult to predict at a local level.

Since we are concerned about the repercussions on our own bird populations, let us now look at the very approximate predictions for Britain, for which it must be strongly emphasised that the uncertainties are very large. The most recent estimates for the next 40 years are that:

a) the sea level may rise by 20cm.
b) the mean temperature may rise by 1-2°C.
c) snowfall and frequency of frosts would be markedly reduced.
d) rainfall changes are uncertain, but any increase may be offset by enhanced evaporation. The net effect may be an alteration in rainfall patterns leading to a greater frequency of droughts, but more intense rain when it does fall.
e) there is no indication of changes in wind strength, but there may be an increase in the variability in weather patterns, which may even lead to temporary cooler periods.

The birds

Having stressed the considerable uncertainties in all the predictions, let us now look at how birds are likely to respond.

As vegetation reacts, there is likely to be considerable modification to habitat, in addition to the changes wrought by man. Natural vegetation types are likely to move northwards and upwards. Coniferous forest may be slowly replaced by deciduous woodland (not a bad thing I hear some readers say!), but, unfortunately, there will be considerable plant mortality as the change will be far too rapid for most species to cope. This will doubtless be the greatest problem, with the rapidity of climate change far exceeding anything that our plant and animal communities have ever experienced. The most resilient and cosmopolitan species may thrive at the expense of the less tolerant. One can presume that European birds at the northern edge of their range in Britain will spread north and consolidate, as long as the rainfall does not show a substantial increase. Equally, it is possible that the ranges of many species in Britain will edge northwards and upwards with the vegetation, while a decrease, or even extinction, may occur in montane species such as the Snow Bunting. Along with modifications in natural vegetation, farming practices will have to alter, with changes in crop distribution and type, upsetting farmland bird populations.

With uncertainty over rainfall, it is impossible to predict the effects on water birds, except to say that small water bodies may become more ephemeral, and some wetland bird populations less viable.

We know that mild winters have a profound effect on resident population, and we can expect fewer severe winters. This will mean higher breeding populations, but, due to vegetation changes, there will be increased competition in less optimum habitats. Breeding may begin earlier, but the dynamics of breeding populations could well be upset.

Significant changes in weather patterns may alter ocean currents, leading to further modifications in ocean temperature and salinity on a local scale. Again, it is impossible to predict the effect on British waters, but with the resulting alteration in fish behaviour and a northward shift in ranges, seabird populations would suffer both in size and distribution.

Of our migratory and wintering birds, the most adversely affected would be the waders. A rise in sea level of the predicted order will have profound effects on estuarine habitats, with high tides regularly covering roosts, and feeding sites being reduced in size and productivity. Coastal marshes and agricultural land would come under increased threat of more regular inundation, creating a higher salinity level and thus changing the whole structure of plant and invertebrate communities, with all that this implies for avian populations. Warming in more northern latitudes may mean that many species, particularly wildfowl, will be able to remain on their breeding grounds for longer periods, with consequent reductions in wintering populations in Britain. At the same time, we may see an increase in those migrants from Britain and northern Europe which normally winter in southern Europe, although it is unlikely that we would see many of the longer distance migrants in winter.

With an increased variability in weather patterns, it is possible that migrations will be disrupted and vagrancy will continue to increase. It has already been suggested that the strengthening of North Atlantic westerlies (not necessarily due to global warming) over the past several decades has been responsible for the greater incidence of Nearctic vagrants in Britain. This highlights another difficulty: the seasonal changes which would be expected to act on migration routes are even harder to predict than annual changes.

Conclusions

Whatever the explanation of the current situation, it seems certain that there is potential for significant disruption to all our bird populations, whether breeding, wintering or migratory. One can foresee that the invaluable monitoring and surveying of these populations already being undertaken will become increasingly vital, giving early indications of change. As the situation is clarified during the next few decades, greater planning may be needed to conserve those habitats that can be conserved. This task will be all the more formidable due to the fact that human socio-economic problems will take priority in most circumstances. It is a sobering thought that, although the earth should be able to endure these changes in the long-term, we and our fellow travellers may not.

Norman Elkins

Seabirds and sandeels

Sandeel stocks around Shetland have declined and this has been linked both to over fishing by local boats and natural factors. Drs Mike Harris and Sarah Wanless of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (*Journal of Applied Ecology vol. 27: 172-187*) have used data on the breeding success of Kittiwakes at 36 colonies collected between 1986 and 1988 to show that conditions in other parts of the North Sea have also deteriorated. At each colony the mean number of young fledged per nest was similar in 1986 and 1987 but at North Sea colonies success was significantly poorer in 1988 and there was a north south trend over the length of eastern Britain with colonies further south more successful. Most breeding failures occurred at the chick stage in North Sea colonies but on the west coast failures occurred at all stages. In the North Sea it seems that food shortage was responsible for low success. It appears that a series of years when few young sandeels were recruited into the population led to a decrease of the smaller sandeels which many seabirds take. This could be linked to changes in the North Sea and North East Atlantic in recent decades. These include an increase in storminess, a progressive delay in the spring phytoplankton bloom, a decrease in zooplankton and an increase in herring. Although an increase in herring might be expected to help seabirds, juvenile fish of the size most seabirds prefer to give their chicks do not usually occur near enough to Shetland to be available to foraging birds. The poor recruitment of sandeels could be at least partially due to predation by herring which are known to eat larval sandeels. Few chicks fledged at some west coast colonies in 1988 but this seems unrelated to the North Sea situation. Information is needed on the diet of Kittiwake chicks in the West before explanations can be offered.

It is important to know what effect birds have on their food supply. The important seabird populations of Shetland feed to a large extent on sandeels. Dr Bob Furness of Glasgow University's Applied Ornithology Unit has estimated the consumption of sandeels by seabirds (*Ibis vol. 132: 205-217*). In the period 1981-83 the Shetland sandeel fishery averaged 45,000 tonnes with an estimated natural consumption of 47,000 tonnes by seabirds, predominantly Guillemots and Fulmars. This figure is probably accurate to about +30%. The little data available suggests that seals may have taken 9,000 tonnes and predatory fish 25,000 tonnes. These figures suggest that natural mortality of Shetland sandeels in 1981-83 was much higher than the figure used in conventional assessments. To get better estimates of what affects sandeel stocks better data is needed on the numbers and diets of seals, predatory fish, and the diet and distribution of Fulmars, especially when they are not feeding young.

Shelduck's fate

Members who visit Aberlady Bay in East Lothian may be interested to learn of a male Shelduck ringed there in March 1972 which died after hitting overhead wires in Ostfold, Norway on 29 May 1989.

David Jenkins

SUTHERLAND BIRDS

A Guide to the Status and Ecology of Birds in Sutherland District.

Edited by
Stewart Angus

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All the contributors are experienced naturalists living in Sutherland. (See back cover flap for biographical details).

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Geese and crops

Geese rely extensively on farmland in Britain. Dr. Myrfyn Owen of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust discusses the conflicts than can arise and suggests possible solutions in the *Ibis (vol. 132: 238-252)*. Several species have increased in numbers largely due to reduced winter mortality. This followed the ban on the sale of dead wild geese which reduced the impetus to shoot them in numbers along with the establishment of sanctuaries. Some species have extra protection due to their rarity in world terms.

Do geese cause damage?

The most common complaint is on grass leys where geese are often said to compete with farm stock. They can also affect arable crops by feeding or by puddling wet soil. Most geese that winter in Britain, apart from the European Whitefronts and Brents in southern England, stay until late April where they are in direct competition with stock for the "spring bite". Farmers also claim that winter grazing affects spring grass, silage and hay. Geese have increasingly been said to affect grain yield. The species that cause the greatest conflict on arable land are Pinkfeet and Greylags in Scotland (mostly winter barley) and Brents in England (winter wheat). The greatest conflict on grassland has been on Islay with Greenland Barnacles and Whitefronts. Studies of the damage done on Islay have had conflicting results and damage may not be as serious as farmers think.

Should geese be culled?

Conservation measure have led to an increase in geese while legislation restricts what farmers can do to protect their crops. On a national scale goose damage is negligible but individual farmers in a few areas suffer disproportionately. The acceptability of goose control differs between populations. From the conservation point of view there would be little objection to reducing Canada Geese although the methods would have to be humane enough not to outrage animal welfare groups and public opinion. Feral Greylags could be reduced by shooting in areas of conflict, though this would probably be resented by wildfowlers who may have reintroduced them, and by birdwatchers who welcome breeding geese in their area. There is no case for reducing the small population of native Greylags in the Outer Hebrides where compensation could easily be paid to the few crofters who might suffer damage. Although geese are numerous on Islay in winter the populations concerned are very small globally. Creating SSSI's which allows compensation to be paid has already helped reduce conflict on Islay and this sort of approach is clearly appropriate there.

The numbers of Pinkfeet and Greylag wintering in Scotland are now well over 100,000 of each species. They are likely to continue to increase as mortality rates are well below the number of young that join the populations in most years. If it is decided to limit these birds to an arbitrary figure such as 100,000 this implies more shooting. At present this is largely limited by wildfowlers who nowadays tend not to shoot many geese at a time. If geese were saleable this would change but there would be opposition from conservationists and many sports shooters.

New approach

Owen suggests that more intensively managed refuges on farm land such as the WWT Reserve at Caerlaverock on the Solway and the RSPB's Gruinart Reserve on Islay are needed. This could reduce conflict in England over the increasing numbers of Brents. However in Scotland the situation with Pinkfeet and Greylags is on a large enough scale to warrant a different approach. Owen suggests designating certain areas where farmers would be paid to grow crops attractive to geese (a type of "set aside") and not to disturb geese from their land. Fewer than 10 areas could cover at least 75% of both Pinkfeet and Greylags. Elsewhere they could be shot at any time of year when over farmland though not on the foreshore or at roosts. A minimum figure such as 100,000 would be set and if the population dropped below this further shooting restrictions would be imposed.

Journals and offprints are available for consultation in the Waterston Library. The Ibis is published by the British Ornithologists' Union, c/o British Museum, Tring, HP23 6AP.

Pink-footed Goose *David Mitchell*

Summer flocking of juvenile Starlings

The two recent notes on summer flocking of juvenile Starlings primarily reported from upland grassland and grass moorland (*SB* 15: 135-136; *SB* 15: 184-185). On 8 July 1988, in a glen on Deeside, Grampian, I recorded flocks of juvenile Starlings feeding on heather moorland. I estimated about 1300 and 1100 in two separate flocks and during the course of the day's walk I came across at least another six flocks of about 100. In total there were probably a minimum of 3000 Starlings in the glen and as far as I could tell all were juveniles. They foraged at altitudes of between 350 and 500m. The nearest major breeding areas were about 15km away. I have visited the glen every summer since 1980 but never saw flocks of Starlings previously. They had probably been feeding on the moorland for at least a week as A. Dykes, the local gamekeeper, saw "big flocks the week before" and I found 19 corpses of juveniles at a nearby Peregrine eyrie. Neither W.H. Pearsall (1977. *Mountains and Moorland* or C. Feare (1984. *The Starling*) recorded Starlings on upland heather moorland.

Graham Rebecca

This appears to be not uncommon but little reported before now. We do not intend to publish further records.

Diver deaths in Moray Firth

As this issue went to press we heard reports that about 100 Red-throated Divers had been killed in the Moray Firth. *BBC Wildlife* magazine reported the deaths were due to infestations of parasites, possibly linked to food shortages in the area weakening the birds and forcing them into shallower water than usual where parasites could have been picked up.

If any members in the area can provide more information on this we shall be glad to publish it.

Golf and Conservation

To give practical advice as to how the needs of wildlife can be incorporated into the design and management of golf courses, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews have financed a book on course conservation – managing golf's natural heritage. Golf courses already play a part in conservation, many of them containing SSSIs. The book, which is being distributed to every golf club in Great Britain, gives guidelines on how clubs can encourage or create wildlife on the courses in keeping with the requirements of play. The book is available at £7.50 post free, from **Publications (Dept PR), NCC, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA.**

Doñana Outcry

Conservationists worldwide are horrified at recent events threatening the Doñana National Park, a wilderness of international distinction and a destination for many British birdwatchers. So too are over a hundred leading Spanish artists and intellectuals who have signed an open letter calling for the proposed 'Costa Doñana' tourist development scheme beside Doñana National Park to be halted and for the authorities to work immediately towards safeguarding Doñana's future.

The scheme, involving ten to fifteen hotels, sports facilities including an irrigated golf course and accommodation for 32,000 people, received local authority approval on 12 December 1989. A press report revealed that the "international golf society of St. Andrews" was one of its promoters. This allegedly Scottish based society, "Europe's most important golf society", was reportedly keen to build Europe's "biggest and best golf course" on the site to accompany hotels of "great quality". This society even claimed that a British conservation group, "Wildlife Wood", considered the site ideal.

Around Doñana vested interests and unscrupulous politicans have proved adept at raising extravagent hopes and ignoring environmental considerations. For example the volume of raw sewage from the existing tourist development beside the Park reached such proportions last summer that warnings against swimming had to be broadcast.

SOC members will be keen to support the efforts of other European ornithological organizations to halt the Costa Doñana scheme. If international dismay cannot be translated into political pressure the future for one of Europe's finest areas for birds looks grim indeed.

For further information contact ***A.M. Jones, C. Princesa Sofia 37, El Rocio, 21750 Huelva, Spain.***

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Raptor Round Up 1989

This report summarises the activities of all the Raptor Study Groups currently active in Scotland making it the most comprehensive report on the state of Scotland's raptors that has ever been published. This year we include data on Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Merlin from Lewis and Harris, data on Buzzard (for Highland) and Osprey are also included in this report for the first time. A total of 316 Eagle home ranges (235 occupied) and 473 Peregrine sites were checked (375 occupied) as were over 357 Merlin sites (over 248 occupied). The amount of fieldwork which raptor group members undertake which results in this report cannot be overstressed, it is especially impressive given that it is done voluntarily and in their spare time. This report would be impossible without them and is presented on their behalf. The group co-ordinator for each species is included in brackets after each heading.

As with 1988, Scotland enjoyed a very good spring allowing good numbers of young to be reared. However, it is depressing to have to report every year that persecution is still going on. 1989 was no exception in this regard with reports of poisoning and destruction of birds of prey reaching record levels. The vast majority of these incidents took place on sporting estates.

GOLDEN EAGLE

North-East Scotland RSG (Robert Rae, Keith Brockie)

Thirty three home ranges were checked, 30 were occupied by pairs and there was a single bird present in one. Twenty two pairs laid eggs, 20 of which hatched. Twenty five young fledged from 18 nests. Success was as good as usual from Grampian but poor in the part of Tayside covered by this group. In Tayside one site failed soon after hatch following disturbance and later an adult male was found shot within the same territory, this was the same area in which a male was found poisoned in 1988. At another site an 8 week old chick died in an emaciated condition due to a chronic capillaria worm infection despite a large amount of prey in the eyrie.

Central Scotland RSG (Dave Dick, Roger Broad)

Twenty two home ranges were checked of which 21 were occupied. Nine pairs reared a total of 11 young. Several sites in Tayside are either empty or fail to produce any young year after year. Many of these are in areas where other raptors also fare badly.

Argyll (Roger Broad)

Seventy five home ranges were checked, 4 were apparently unoccupied, of the seventy one territories occupied at least 67 were by pairs. Between 45 and 49 pairs laid and in at least 30 of these chicks hatched. Twenty eight sites were successful producing 34 young. In one home range breeding was confirmed for the first time and in another successful breeding was proved for the first time in over 10 years.

Highland RSG (Jeff Watson, RSPB Highland)

One hundred and nineteen sites were checked – sixty two pairs were successful rearing 77 young. This was their best season since 1982. At one site in the west of the area an adult was found shot under its eyrie – a chick was also dead in the nest presumably having died from starvation. At another site on a shooting estate an adult and 2 chicks were found dead on the nest – a rabbit laced with poison was found beside them.

Uist RSG (Tim Dix)

Pairs were present in each of the 14 territories checked. Only 2 pairs laid eggs and only one was definitely successful rearing one young. Direct persecution occurred at 2 sites and perhaps at 4 others. At 4 sites no nest was found although all were occupied by adult pairs. The only prey remains recorded were rabbits and a Raven.

Lewis and Harris (Alison Rothwell)

Fifty three territories were checked but birds were only definitely present in 36 of them. Nineteen pairs are known to have laid, 11 pairs hatched eggs and raised a total of 12 young. Five pairs are known to have failed due to their eggs being smashed in the nest.

Peregrine *Keith Brockie*

PEREGRINE

North-East Scotland RSG (Jon Hardy, Keith Brockie)

One hundred and fifteen sites were monitored, 101 of which were occupied by at least one bird. Eighty pairs were known to lay and at least 59 of these hatched young. 120 young flew from 56 sites. At least 10 pairs present on shooting estates are believed to have failed as a direct result of human persecution. Young were stolen from 3 sites in Tayside. Also in Tayside a clutch of 5 was recorded from which 4 young were reared. Swift and Ptarmigan were noted as prey items.

Central Scotland RSG (Patrick Stirling-Aird)

Birds were present at 56 of the 72 sites visited. A total of 36 pairs were successful producing 76 young. Small broods were noted at a number of sites and it was felt that this may have been due to snow in this area in the second week of May at peak hatching time.

South-West Scotland RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

Fifty five sites were checked with only 44 being occupied. Eggs were laid at 37 sites and hatched at 23. These were all successful rearing a minimum of 49 young. Nine sites were robbed and 11 traditional sites were unused. The absence of birds from these traditional sites is undoubtedly due in part of the trapping of adult birds for the illegal falconry trade which is carried out in this area.

South-East Scotland RSG (George Carse)

Thirty five sites were checked, 30 were occupied. Eggs were laid at 25 sites but hatched at only 12. Ten sites produced over 26 young. Four sites were robbed (two twice having relaid), five failed due to persecution and one failed at hatch due to excessive disturbance from "birdwatchers". The adult male was found poisoned at one site but the female managed to rear 3 young on her own. A large chick was found dead at one site, puncture marks in its neck suggest it may have been killed by an adder.

Argyll (Roger Broad)

Fifty five sites were checked, 52 occupied 48 by pairs. Twenty eight pairs laid eggs at least 22 of which hatched them. Twenty nine chicks flew from 16 nests. Breeding success was similar to 1988.

Highland RSG (Colin Crooke)

Eighty eight sites were checked with pairs being found in 53 of them. Forty six pairs laid eggs with 32 successfully hatching. Thirty one sites were successful rearing 60 young. In one area a surprising number of territories held no birds and data from elsewhere in the Highlands suggests that this species is doing less well than a decade ago.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

All 30 known sites were checked but only 17 were occupied. As in previous years success was very poor with only 6 sites known to be successful.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)

Three sites were known to hold birds but only one was successful rearing one young. It is still unknown why Peregrines in Orkney and Shetland fare so badly.

Uist RSG (Tim Dix)

Ten pairs were found occupying territories but nests could only be seen at 5. Three pairs laid and hatched eggs producing 6 young. Other

sites were perhaps successful but this is difficult to prove given the inaccessibility of the sites. Prey items included Greenshank and Cuckoo.

Lewis and Harris (Alison Rothwell)

Ten territories were examined with birds being present on 9. None of these are known to have laid eggs. This area suffers from the same problem of inaccessibility as the Uists.

MERLIN

North-East and Central RSG

This is a combined summary as there was overlap of coverage in Tayside.

Grampian (Graham Rebecca)

Forty five pairs were found, 37 of which laid eggs. At 27 of these sites eggs hatched at least 71 young were reared from 16 sites.

Tayside (Wendy Mattingley)

Twenty five pairs were located, 17 of which reared at least one young. Three failed early or failed to breed, 4 failed at the egg stage and the young were predated at one site. Fifteen sites were known to produce at least 45 young.

Angus (Ron Downing)

Eleven pairs were located and 8 of these were known to lay eggs; 7 pairs hatched eggs and from these at least 17 young flew.

South-East Scotland RSG (Alan Heavisides)

At least 38 sites were checked with birds present in over 29. Over 15 sites successfully produced a minimum of 54 young. At one site the female was found dead beside the nest – the cause of death was never ascertained though she had not been shot. At the 2 areas in which most monitoring took place it was noted that young birds were heavily infested with flat flies.

South-West Scotland RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

Forty sites were visited of which 18 were found to be occupied; 16 pairs laid eggs and hatching took place at 12. Eleven pairs fledged a total of 40 young. All failures were thought to be from natural causes.

Argyll (Roger Broad)

Nine pairs were located as well as 13 singles in suitable areas. At the 9 sites where breeding was proved 2 pairs failed and 6 pairs successfully reared at least 14 chicks. The outcome was unknown at the remaining site.

Highland (Brian Etheridge)

Sixty sites were checked with 41 pairs on territory. At 32 sites eggs were laid and hatched at 28 of them. All these were successful producing 85 young – a reasonably good year.

PEREGRINE

Home range/site	L&H	NE	C	SW	SE	Argyll	Hghld	Ork	Shet	Uist	Total
Checked	10	115	72	55	35	55	88	30	3+	10+	473+
Birds present	9	101	56	44	30	52	53+	17	3	10	375+
Eggs laid	0	80		37	25	28	46	11		3	267+
Eggs hatched	0	59+		23	12	22+	32			3	194+
Chicks fledged	0	56	36	23	10	16	31	6+	1	3	182+
Total young fledged	0	120+	76	49+	26+	29	60	6+	1	6	373+

GOLDEN EAGLE

Home range/site	L&H	NE	C	Argyll	Hghld	Uist	Total
Checked	53	33	22	75	119	14	316
Birds present	36+	31	21	71		14	235+
Eggs laid	19	22		45-49		2	159+
Eggs hatched	11	20		30+		2	134+
Chicks fledged	11	18	9	28	62	1	129
Total young fledged	12	25	11	34	77	1	160

MERLIN

Sites	L&H	NE&C	SW	SE	Argyll	Hghld	Ork	Shet	Uist	Total
Checked	33	81+	40	38+	22	60	44	29+	10	357+
Birds present	18	81	18	29+	9	41+	13	29	10	248+
Eggs laid	7	67	16	19+	7+	32	11	28	6	193+
Eggs hatched	7	52	12	17+	6+	28		21	5	155+
Chicks fledged	7	51	11	15+	6	28	7	20	4	149+
Total young fledged	20+	123+	40	54+	14+	85	23	59+	10	428+

OSPREY

Number of pairs known	54
Number laying eggs	49
Number of clutches hatched	37
Number of successful broods	36
Total number of young fledged	78

THE KESTREL

Andrew Village

Dr Village's book is an inviting combination of readability and scholarship on one of the commonest European birds of prey, *Falco tinnunculus*, about which surpisingly little is known. Illustrated by Keith Brockie.

March 1990, 300 pages, ISBN: 0856610542, £18.00

BIRDS BY NIGHT

Graham Martin

This is an investigation of the complex relationship between nocturnal birds and the particular environment that they inhabit from dusk to dawn. The survey covers not only the activities of owls and other nocturnal birds but also species which are only occasionally nocturnal, together with those owls which are primarily diurnal in habit. The special case of cave-dwelling birds is also considered.
The study of nocturnality in birds encompasses field ornithology, sensory science, ecology and physics, and involves comparisons of the sensory capacities of other animal species, including man, to respond to the night world.

September 1990, c. 288 pages, ISBN: 0856610593, £18.00 (t)

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Orkney (Eric Meek)

The 44 known sites were checked of which 13 were occupied; 11 pairs laid eggs 3 of which failed at this stage. One brood was taken by a mammal, probably a cat. The remaining 7 pairs reared 23 young.

Shetland (Pete Ellis

Twenty nine pairs were located of which 28 laid eggs; 7 pairs failed at the egg stage. Twenty sites successfully reared between 59 and 61 chicks.

Uist (Tim Dix)

Ten pairs were found occupying territories. Six nests were known to be built, eggs were laid in five and four produced a total of 10 chicks to fledging. Eggs were found smashed at one site.

Lewis and Harris (Alison Rothwell)

Thirty three traditional sites were checked and birds were found to be present in 18 of them. Eggs were known to be laid in 7 nests – these were all successful raising a total of at least 20 young.

OSPREY

(Roy Dennis)

Fifty four eyries were occupied, 2 by single adults. Two new eyries were found. The number of successful nests, young reared and mean brood size were all lower than in 1988. It is believed that a cold wet spell at the peak hatching time in early June may have caused chick losses. Nine nests were robbed by egg collectors (2 groups were caught and prosecuted), the remainder of failures were from natural causes.

BUZZARD

Highland RSG (Malcolm Harvey)

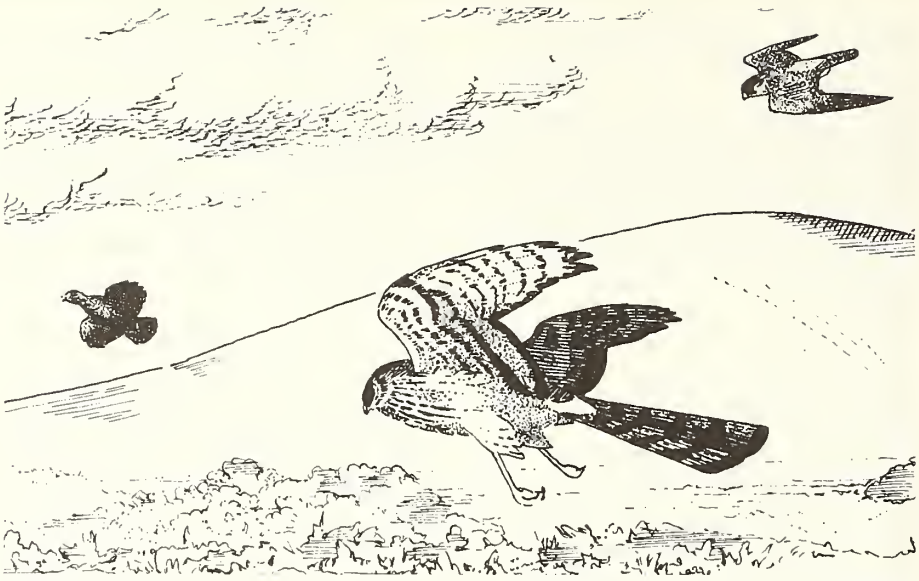
Fifty seven pairs were located of which 28 were successful rearing 50 young. It was considered to be a poor year in many areas with lack of voles felt to be the cause in one area.

KESTREL

South-West Scotland RSG (Gordon Riddle)

1989 was only slightly less successful for Kestrels in Ayrshire than the record year of 1988. The excellent weather in spring and summer seemed to compensate for far fewer voles being about. Breeding was later in 1989 due to a cold spell in April and territory occupation was average at 77%. 82% of eggs hatched and 86% of broods survived. In the 23 territories where full results were known only 3 pairs failed to rear young and these were due to desertion, robbery and a Peregrine dislodging the Kestrels after changing sites.

Stuart Benn
RSPB



Hunting raptors *Angus Hogg*

Winter observations of Hen Harrier and Peregrine

During regular visits to Hen Harrier winter roosts over the period 1981-85 my colleague, Richard Gladwell, and I were intrigued to discover what appeared to be a close hunting relationship between Hen Harrier and Peregrine. This became particularly obvious during the winter of 1984-85 as our work at the roost sites intensified. Winter often results in a natural scarcity of prey in the hunting ranges of both species, which appears to have forged a ''marriage'' of sorts. This could be intentional and necessary, but it was initially difficult to determine the greater benefactor from the behaviour.

Early observations of these unusual partners, on fence posts only a few metres apart, were treated as mildly interesting, if a little odd. The reasons for this attachment became clearer as we watched from a favoured roadside layby which faced opposing hillsides. One hill, to the south, was heather-clad with a regular gathering of Red Grouse, while the one to the north had more rough grazing than heather, and a few single posts used by the resident Peregrine. As we watched, the Peregrine displayed commendable patience until a marauding Hen Harrier obligingly flushed some grouse or smaller species. At that point, the Peregrine immediately sprang into action, but was not always successful in making a kill, and would usually return to its normal perch to await the next opportunity.

This spectacle acted like a magnet to both Richard and myself on many occasions during the winter. On 20 January 1985, I was driving towards the same location when a tiercel Peregrine emerged suddenly from the roadside heather, forcing an emergency stop, as I watched it go past in the opposite direction. Turning my attention to the area whence it had come, I was surprised to see a female Hen Harrier feeding on something at a distance from my car of some 40 metres. The car proved to be an acceptable hide but, on several occasions, passing traffic was to disturb the harrier. A continuous line of cars gave me the chance to go out and check the prey item, a Red Grouse. Having moved my car a further 100 metres along the road I waited, and the harrier returned. This time it was buzzed by the Peregrine, and retreated to the hillside where it was joined by a second female Hen Harrier. However, it then moved on, showing no further interest in the prey item. Richard and I had noted on previous occasions that there seemed to be some kind of bond between the two harriers, so we waited to see what would happen next. After a long period, both harriers took off and their intent seemed obvious, but the tortuous route back to the kill was unexpected. Once they alighted however, they **both** proceeded to feed on the prey item; a sight little described by other observers. I believe the actual kill had been made by the Peregrine with the harrier in close company, but the lift of a Red Grouse to a plucking post may have proved difficult for the tiercel. Additionally, the location may have proved too public for the Peregrine.

This theory was to be proven on 22 February 1985. Seated on a hillside high in the moorland, and having satisfied myself that all was quiet at the roost site, I decided to have lunch. I should have known better, and tea and sandwiches went sky high as I caught sight of a movement some 50 metres from the roost. Four birds were visible, just above the ground, but their identity could not be ascertained at first. At the rear was a Peregrine and, close to it, a female Hen Harrier. It was apparent that the Peregrine had struck down something which had fallen behind a huge peat hag, and the harrier had moved quickly towards another hag just to the left. There it took stock of the situation and, shortly afterwards, the Peregrine appeared in view, seemingly plucking some kind of feathered prey on the ground. After observing for some time, I accidentally disturbed it as I changed position. It was a brown, immature tiercel this time. By now, a second Hen Harrier had appeared on the hillside. I checked the prey, another Red Grouse, and left it high on a tussock before retreating to watch at an acceptable distance. Having only gone a few metres, one of the harriers flew over to the carcase, presumably to start feeding. It would be impossible to say if this behaviour is regular, or simply opportunistic, but I think that the relationship between these two predators on the above occasions is worthy of note.

Dick Roxburgh

Lockerbie conference

A move to the south west saw this year's SOC/BTO one-day spring conference held in the Queen's Hotel, Lockerbie, and attended by over 160 people, a sell out.

The day started with a superb slide presentation on the birds of south west Scotland presented by stalwarts Bobby Smith and Jim Young. This set the scene for the next speaker, Gordon Riddle, who outlined his work on the Kestrel which included a long term ringing programme covering 400 sites. Gordon's enthusiasm for his work was evident – but who could resist a 'Kestrel', when there is in the region of 70000 breeding pairs – or is it cans of lager? Next Geoff Shaw started by showing Stan in his true colours (sensitive readers will be relieved that the rather coarse slide suggesting the President eats too much has been censored). With excellent computer graphics he went on to outline the state of Barn Owls. Their nest sites are disappearing but plastic barrels can make suitable substitutes.

Jim Reid continued with an up-date on the New Atlas with the message that the first two years coverage has taken us to about 2/3 coverage so lets finish it off properly in year three. Under the 'wing' of Jim the RAF Bird Club will assist with some remote areas. He shall also send the SOC membership secretary to Skye for a week for her sins at recent residential conferences.

The afternoon session started with Nigel Clark's talk on waders on the Solway, highlighting the movements of Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Dunlin and Turnstone. Bob Spencer then spoke on migration about the Irish Sea; including information on a much overlooked area, the Isle of Man.

A different slant was then given to the day by an outline by Ken Bruce of the role of the wildfowl liaison officer. His job consists of links with outside bodies, offering advice to police officers to support prosecutions and promoting wildlife. The advent of such officers should hopefully see more successful cases under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

A quick break for tea then on to a talk by David Hill where he showed the benefits of research work in conservation and the need to participate in field studies. David also informed us of the farm strategy of the BTO and the fact that they now have an advisory service.

Finally we returned to more fine slides of the birds of south west Scotland with Edmund Fellowes, Richard Mearns and Brian Turner.

The audience dispersed contented having enjoyed the good food and company of fellow members. How many saw the big Starling flocks on the way home or was it all Kestrel, Woodpecker and famous Grouse? If you want a more detailed conference report make sure you book early for next year and you can enjoy the experience personally.

Sheila Horsburgh

We are grateful to all the contributors and especially local members for all their hard work. Next year the spring conference will move back north to the Drumossie Hotel south of Inverness on Saturday 9th March 1991. Full details will appear with the December issue of Scottish Bird News.

An artificial Kingfisher bank

When improving or maintaining wildlife habitats, it is usually essential to incorporate specific forms of management for individual species or groups. These may include such obvious examples as the provision of islands for loafing and breeding birds, nestboxes, vegetation control for the benefit of butterflies or the creation of small pools for dragonflies and amphibians.

At the RSPB Loch Ken/River Dee Marshes Reserve, Kirkcudbrightshire in a wetland situation with a rather small, scattered Kingfisher population, it was decided to provide an artificial bank utilising a pile of soil left over from management completed during 1986. This management had allowed controlled water level flooding of a marsh and, consequently, was now providing a more suitable habitat for Kingfishers. Assuming that Kingfishers were restricted by the lack of suitable nestsites, it was hoped that the bank would induce the visiting birds to remain to breed.

The artificial bank was constructed during November 1989. Firstly the firm soil pile was dug away on one side to create an almost vertical face. All of the excavated material was thrown on top of the existing pile, and the back wire netted and turfed to stop it slipping away. More soil was added to increase the height, then turfed to complete the actual bank work.

Kingfisher *Brian Turner*

Lastly a small pool was excavated below the vertical earth face and linked to an existing water channel. This was to provide immediate access to the water and should also act as a ground predator deterrent. The whole completed bank was almost 2m high × 3.5m wide. Wave action during very high water levels caused some of the face to collapse, but this will be cleared away and the face neatened each spring.

During March 1990 a further site was created by digging away the steeply sloping bank of a water channel to form a vertical face. This was much easier and visually immediately acceptable, whereas at the artificial site it will take a short time for plants to grow to conceal unnatural parts. Appearance is important in a nature reserve situation, yet there must be places where other methods can be tried, and, even if not pleasing to the human eye, being functional for the birds must be the most important factor. We now await our first occupants.

R.G. Hawley

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The Birds of North East Scotland

North East Scotland, defined here as Grampian Region less Moray District, corresponds to the old counties of Kincardineshire, Aberdeenshire and most of Banffshire. The area has a wide range of habitats and thus a great diversity of wintering and breeding birds. These range from huge flocks of wintering wildfowl and spectacular seabird colonies to those specialists of the high tops, the Golden Eagle, Ptarmigan, Dotterel and Snow Bunting. *The Birds of North-East Scotland* is based on the results of a year-round atlas carried out during 1981/84, and also summarises all bird records for 1975/88. It forms the most comprehensive account to date of the birds found in the area. The book also contains chapters on how the landscape was formed, its vegetation and special bird communities, and details of the often novel methods used to summarise and analyse the survey results.

Landscape and vegetation

The geological structure ranges from ancient bedrocks of granite through to the depositions of the last glaciation. The formation of the present drainage system is described together with that of features familiar to local birdwatchers such as the seabird cliffs of the north coast, Buchan and Fowlsheugh, the lochs which formed in glacial kettleholes, the characteristic whale-back ridges of the Grampian uplands and the tors of Clachnaben, Bennachie and Ben Avon.

Areas of natural and semi-natural vegetation have become increasingly fragmented this century. The Sands of Forvie and Ythan Estuary National Nature Reserve has extensive coastal heath and dune communities, and a small area of salt marsh which is nonetheless the largest in the region. Many of the lowland heaths and marshes in Buchan have been reclaimed by modern agricultural practices, but further inland, and especially in Deeside, there are still important areas of semi-natural vegetation, notably on the Muir of Dinnet NNR. The pinewood of Glen Tanar comprises one of the finest remnants of ancient Caledonian forest left, with other notable pinewoods at Ballochbuie and Mar. There are excellent birchwoods at Crathie, Morrone and Glen Quoich. Moorland and mountain cover about a third of the region and hold important breeding populations of several species.

Snow Buntings — *Rob Hume*

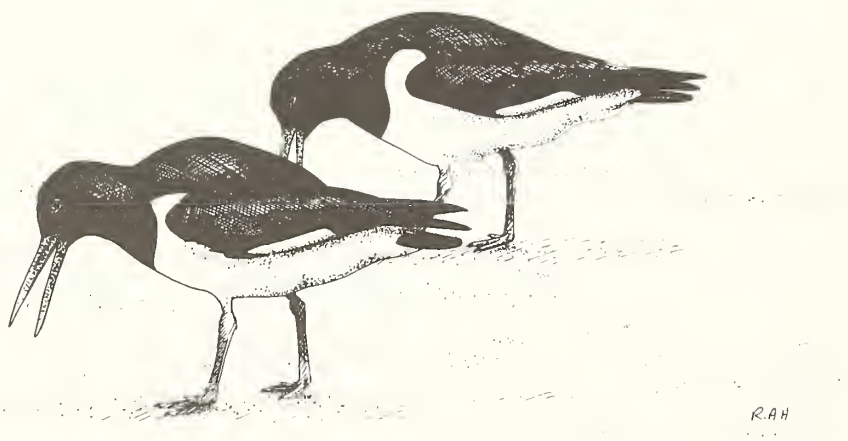
The Atlas

Following the BTO/IWC Breeding Bird Atlas of 1968/72, several counties produced local atlases based on tetrads (2 × 2km). The north-east Scotland Atlas was based instead on areas of similar habitat or land use as the recording unit. This was done because it would not have been practical for the small number of birdwatchers in the north east to attempt thorough coverage of the large number of tetrads. Further, to allow species – habitat associations to be assessed, sites that were relatively homogeneous in habitat were required. Except where key sites would have been split arbitrarily, 10km square boundaries were adhered to, so that distribution may be compared more easily with previous and future surveys. The fieldwork took place throughout the year, since many species show interesting changes in distribution with season in an area possessing such extremes of habitat. Results are presented in a variety of ways. Maps of relative abundance are given for nearly 200 species, and for almost all summering species, breeding distribution is shown on the same map. Seasonal abundance is indicated by histograms – nearly 500 in all – and habitat associations are summarised in bar diagrams. Changes in altitudinal distribution through the year are illustrated using clock diagrams. Also given are maps of agricultural land uses, forestry, soil types, climate and, most importantly, semi-natural habitats, the latter compiled from a habitat survey by Grampian Regional Council.

Wintering wildfowl and waders

Flocks of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese are the most important wintering wildfowl, and the dusk and dawn flights at the main roosts are one of the wildlife spectacles of the area. The Loch of Strathbeg is one of the premier sites for wintering wildfowl in Britain, and has held over 800 swans, 35,000 geese and 8000 ducks in recent winters. The RSPB reserve there now boasts a new visitor centre. It has been extended to include some damp meadows behind the loch shore which have already proved very popular with Pinkfeet, Wigeon and waders. Eider is the most numerous sea duck; more than a thousand are regularly present at some sites. Several hundred Long-tailed Duck and Common Scoter are found at times, with smaller numbers of Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser scattered along the coast. Nationally important numbers of Red-throated Divers occur between Aberdeen and Collieston.

Turnstones and Purple Sandpipers are abundant along the rocky shores of Grampian, with notable concentrations at Aberdeen, Peterhead and from Fraserburgh to Rosehearty. Large flocks of Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew are found on the Buchan farmland where they frequently congregate at traditional sites. The Ythan estuary is too small to hold large numbers of waders, but its narrow shape offers good views of the birds along most of its length and all the common waders are found here.



Oystercatchers — *Rob Hume*

The original artwork for the cover, Keith Brockie's fine Capercaillie, will go to the highest bid received by 1 Aug at the address on p.13; proceeds towards publication costs.

Breeding wildfowl and waders

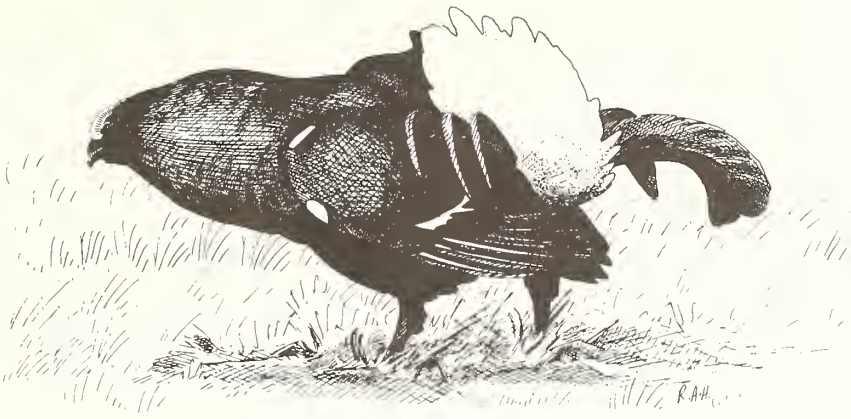
The colony of around 4000 Eiders that nest at the Sands of Forvie is the most significant feature of the breeding wildfowl. Small numbers breed along all the rocky coasts. About 50 pairs of Shelduck breed by the Ythan. There are roughly 30 pairs of Wigeon in mid-Deeside, and the Dee catchment holds a healthy population of Goosanders despite local persecution. Red-breasted Mergansers are now scarce breeders in Kincardine and Deeside and very rare breeders on the coast. Mallard, Teal and Tufted Duck breed in all suitable areas, while Shoveler, Pochard and, recently, Ruddy Duck occasionally nest.

Many small marshes, wet meadows and areas of rough ground, especially in Buchan, have been lost over the last two decades, and the populations of Curlew, Snipe and Redshank are much smaller than formerly. Oystercatcher and Lapwing are abundant on much of the arable farmland and pasture, but Lapwing are scarce in the intensively managed farmland of the Buchan plain.

Breeding seabirds

The region has some of the largest and most spectacular seabird cliffs in mainland Britain. The huge colony on the conglomerate cliffs at Fowlsheugh is unusually accessible and presently holds around 52,000 nesting Guillemots, 4500 Razorbills and 22,000 Kittiwakes, with smaller numbers of Fulmars, Herring Gulls, Puffins and Shags. The large colonies at Longhaven and Troup have a similar species composition. Small numbers of Black Guillemots nest at a few sites and Gannets bred for the first time in 1988. Sandwich, Common, Arctic and Little Terns all breed at the Sands of Forvie. Sandwich Terns have also nested at Strathbeg and Little Terns regularly nest at St Cyrus, while a large colony of Arctic Terns has recently become established inside the perimeter fence of the St Fergus gas terminal. The world's largest documented colony of Common Gulls breeds on the Correen Hills and a few pairs have recently joined Aberdeen's roof-nesting Oystercatchers.

Long-eared Owl *Mike Innes*



Blackcock *Rob Hume*

Mountain and moorland

The rolling moors of the Grampian foothills have large populations of Red Grouse and many estates have viable shoots. Golden Plovers are found in suitable habitats on both the high tops and the lower moors and mosses, but Dunlin are scarce. Lapwings and Curlews occupy lower ground and Snipe and Redshank are found in wetter areas. Black Grouse frequent the moor edge and old pinewoods. These upland areas have nationally important populations of Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Merlin; extensive survey work has located over 60 active territories of the latter. Hen Harriers have become scarce in recent years and cases of persecution of all raptors are still all too frequent. The high tops have a unique community; Ptarmigan and Dotterel are particularly abundant on the Mounth hills, but most of the Snow Buntings nest in the Cairngorms.

Woodland

Capercaillie and Scottish Crossbills occur in several pinewoods but for reasons that are not fully understood, Crested Tits have failed to establish themselves on Deeside. They may eventually spread into the area through the conifer plantations along the Moray coast. Most mixed deciduous woodland is found on the policies of large estates, and much of Buchan is almost treeless. Consequently Blackcaps, Garden Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Wood Warblers are all scarce. The Redstart is declining, and analyses in the book identify the sites that are most likely to lose this attractive species in the next few years. On the positive side, Green Woodpeckers and Jays have both spread north since the mid-1960s, and are now firmly established in suitable areas. The older Deeside woods have on occasion attracted rare breeding passerines, including Wrynecks, Red-backed Shrikes, Fieldfares, Redwings and Bramblings.

Current threats

The problems facing the birds and other wildlife in the north-east are similar to those in many other parts of Britain. Pressure from other interests, notably water sports, increasingly threatens both breeding and wintering wildfowl at coastal and inland sites. Agricultural improvements have proved detrimental to several species in the recent past, but moves towards less intensive agriculture may change this; Grampian had one of the largest take-ups of the set-aside scheme in Britain. The afforestation of heather moorland and marginal farmland has displaced many breeding waders and birds of prey.

There is currently great debate about the effect of commercial fisheries on seabird populations but climatic change and alterations in the behaviour of key prey species may prove the biggest threat to the huge seabird colonies. The data presented in this book provide a baseline on which future changes in bird populations in the north-east can be measured.

The birds of North East Scotland is edited by S.T. Buckland, M.V. Bell and N. Picozzi assisted by M.L. Tasker and K. Brockie with contributions from M.V. Bell, W.R.P. Bourne, S.T. Buckland, A.G. Knox, P.R. Marren, A.G. Payne, J.S. Smith, M.L. Tasker and A. Watson and a foreword by The Duke of Edinburgh. It contains approx 480 pages, 250 maps, 475 histograms, 320 figures, 230 tables, 200 drawings and 16 black and white photographs. Special offer £19.95 post free from ***North-East Scotland Bird Club, Drumshalloch Croft, Banchory, Kincardine-shire AB3 3QB.***

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The Scottish Highlands and Islands

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Birdline Scotland runs in association with National Birdline details for which can be obtained via Birdline enquiries (0263) 741139.

Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland****, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

Late winter and early spring were exceptionally mild, with a south-westerly air stream prevailing. The result was few rare birds, but a scattering of very early summer migrants.

Single **Black-throated Divers** were seen in Shetland and Orkney and a total of about 5 off the coasts of Lothian and Borders, whilst single **White-billed Divers** were off Whalsay and Rousay. There was a high count of 20 **Slavonian Grebes** on the Loch of Harray, Orkney and 17 were seen off Gosford. The **Black-browed Albatross** returned to Hermaness on 17 March after an absence of over 2 years, but only remained until 7 April. Single **Bitterns** spent part of the winter at Duddingston Loch and Dalmellington.

On the Loch of Harray **Mute Swans** peaked at 600 and **Whooper Swans** 500 in Jan. Unusual **Geese** included a **Bean** on North Ronaldsay, **Snow** near Elgin and at Caldfield, Loch of Skene, Cameron Reservoir and Aberlady, a **Dark-bellied Brent** at Aberlady, and a **Black Brant** on Islay, the first Scottish record of this Pacific race of the **Brent Goose**. The **Wigeon** flock at Loch of Harray reached 4,500 in Jan. The first Lothian record of **American Wigeon** was an imm male at Gladhouse on 3 Feb followed in March by an adult male at Musselburgh. The Lochwinnoch **Black Duck** remained into March and another was found at Loch of Spiggie on 4 Feb. A male **Red-crested Pochard** was at Brodgar in Jan; there were 670 **Pochard** and 2,000 **Tufted Duck** on Loch of Harray in Feb and a **Pochard** × **Tufted Duck hybrid** on Loch of Brow in Jan. The male **Ring necked Duck** wintered again at Loch Insh and a female was seen at Loch Flemmington near Inverness. A **Scaup** × **Tufted Duck hybrid** was on Clickimin Loch in March. Male **King Eiders** were at Reawick, the Ythan and Don Mouth and Tayport. A male **Surf Scoter** was off Lossiemouth and Burghead and up to 3 off Gosford in March.

Great Skuas included 1 off Irvine on 23 Jan, and 2 off Turnberry on 3 Feb; the first returned to Shetland on 25 March. A **Pomarine Skua** was at Irvine in late Jan. Single **Mediterranean** and **Little Gulls** were widespread. An adult **Ring-billed Gull** was at Stromness and an adult **Yellow-legged Gull** in Kirkwall. **Iceland Gulls** were relatively scarce and **Glaucous Gulls** even less common. The **Kumlien's Gull** again wintered at Banff and a **Glaucous** × **Herring** hybrid was in Inverness. Two **Sandwich Terns** wintered off Stronsay and another in the Firth of Forth.

Late winter mortality of **auks** was high in the Northern Isles, possible linked to the constant strong winds. Beached bird surveys produced 204 dead **Guillemots** and an unprecedented total of 121 dead **Razorbills** in Shetland in Feb, whilst on Scapa Beach, Orkney 93 dead **Guillemots** and 52 dead **Razorbills** were found on 6 Feb. Fourteen **Little Auks** were found dead in Shetland in Feb, but at the same time Sullom Voe held 12 live ones, with 2 more found dead on Scapa Beach and 7 live ones seen off North-east Scotland.

The mild weather encouraged 2 **Turtle Doves** and a **Barn Owl** to winter in Shetland, where at least 2 female **Snowy Owls** also remained.

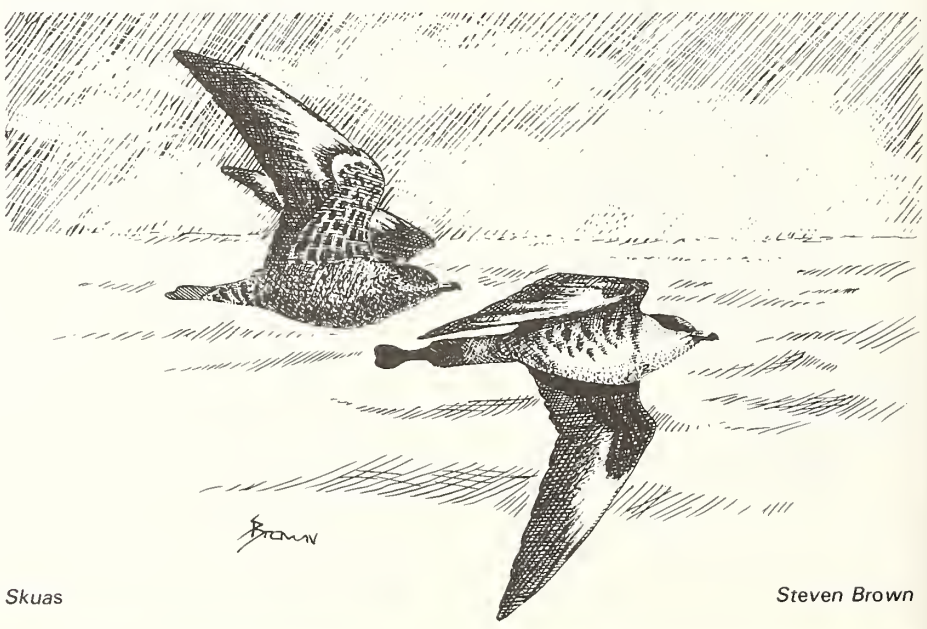
Kingfishers wintered at Inverness and Don Mouth. The only **Shore Lark** was at Tyninghame. Very early summer migrants included **Sand Martins** at Musselburgh, **Swallows** at Ayton Castle and **House Martins** at Maybole on 17 March. **Waxwings** continued to be seen in small numbers in many areas.

The first **Wheatear** was at Eyemouth on 6 March and the first **Ring Ouzel** was in the Pentlands on 18 March. There was an influx of migrant **Chiffchaffs** in March, with over 30 there at Eyemouth on 25 March. A **Firecrest** took advantage of the mild weather to winter at Melvick, Sutherland. Two **Goldfinches** were seen in Kirkwall and 7 **Redpolls** on Unst in Jan. **Lapland Buntings** were scarce, the only reports being 5 at Aberlady and 1 at Eyemouth.

Stop Press

A magnificent white ***Gyr Falcon*** *was seen in Shetland on 16 April and another on Islay at the same time.*

Pete Ellis



Skuas *Steven Brown*

SOC News

Cameron Reservoir hide St Andrews

Changes have had to be made to the arrangements for access to this and it has been suggested that these arrangements should be given wider publicity so that they are known to SOC members outwith Fife.

Cameron Reservoir lies some four miles south west of St Andrews, off the A915 St Andrews-Leven road. There is a hide on the north shore, access to which is open to SOC and SWT members. The hide belongs to the SWT and is in fact the old one from the Loch of the Lowes which was translated to Cameron when the hide at the Lowes was upgraded in 1984. The issue of keys and the maintenance of the hide have been looked after since then by John Wiffen who devoted much time and energy to Cameron after his retirement. Sadly John who was Chairman of the then St Andrews Branch from 1978-81, and subsequently Treasurer of the Fife & Kinross Branch of the SWT died unexpectedly in mid-December and new arrangements have had to be made.

Anyone interested in obtaining a key to the hide should contact **Bryan Gill, 45 Irvine Crescent, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8LG Tel: 0334 72053.** There is a deposit of £2 for the key plus an annual charge of £2 to pay upkeep and improvements to the hide or a special offer of six years' subscription for £10!

Although best known as a site for wintering geese Cameron can turn up interesting records at any time of year. It is well worth a visit! Please record your observations in the log-book when you do go there.

Donald Stewart

Cameron Reservoir

Members who during the SOC's conference at North Berwick signed a petition against the development of a shooting range at Cameron Reservoir in Fife will be pleased to know that the plans were rejected by North Fife Regional Planning Committee. This, of course, is only the first round, and determined developers could appeal to the Secretary of State to overturn the local decision, but it is nevertheless as satisfactory an outcome as we could have hoped for. No doubt the disturbance to the local community was the main reason for the rejection, but the issue of the geese and Cameron being an SSSI also came into it. I would like to thank every one who signed my letter. Every bit helps.

Anne-Marie Smout

Choughs in Scotland

I am currently reviewing all historical and recent records of the Chough in Scotland, in order to produce a paper consisting of atlas-type maps of its past and present distribution. I have checked all Scottish Bird Reports and standard references, but feel sure that many records are lying in notebooks waiting to see the light of day. Have you got any *unpublished* Chough sightings away from Islay? *Any* records will be most gratefully received, acknowledged, and forwarded to the relevant recorder. Many thanks. **Clive McKay, Zoology Department, The University, Glasgow G12 8QQ or Telephone 0865 515703.**

Birdwatching in Lothian

Club Members visiting Lothian who wish to know whether any interesting birds are about or who want advice on where to go are invited to contact **Peter Gordon (tel. Aberlady 588).** Members resident in Lothian are invited to join our local Grapevine – for details contact **Ruaraidh Hamilton (tel. Haddington 3636).** We're cheaper and friendlier than other, commercial organisations!

The Lothian Grapevine has features others might wish to copy. Members join a group; depending on their interests – or distance they will travel to see birds – this will either be a local or national group. Local is defined as a maximum of 1½ hours drive from Edinburgh and takes in the Lothians and parts of adjacent regions. Each group member has a list of the other group members and undertakes to phone whoever is next in line. Only the group leader has to make a second phone call to pass on the news to the next group as well as his or her own members. The advantage of this system is you don't need to keep paying 38p per minute to check what is on the commercial phone service because you know that the SOC system guarantees you will be told when anything turns up. It also means that nice local birds that wouldn't get into the national phone line are mentioned eg an approachable Curlew Sandpiper that can easily be photographed or a nice flock of Waxwings. Needless to say group leaders are experienced people who know what to let out and what to suppress in the interests of the birds.

Unsolicited testimonial

Dear Sir, I am not your foolish! Before two years ago, I ordered two copy of A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World, but I never accept this books. However, I want this books, and your problem is that you sold books which are non-existent. I already informed St. Ann's Books about your "communists" behaviour (it means that you are like Yugoslavian stupid communists).

If I don't receive books which I ordered until the end of May, I will inform all European ornithological organizatioons and institutions about your forgetful.

Our former Bookshop customer from Yugoslavia had ordered a soft back version of a book then only available in hard cover. The situation was explained to him by Fiona Slack who has been helping us in a variety of ways since the Bookshop was sold. We are most grateful to Fiona for her commitment to the Club and wish her well in her new job in the world of finance which she will have started by the time you read this.

Sales Items

All prices include P&P, except overseas who should add £1.50. Please make cheques, Postal Orders payable to "SOC" at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).

SOC Sweatshirts, Navy (S,M,L)	£10.50
SOC Tie (Navy, Maroon, Dark Green)	£ 5.95
SOC Badge	£ 3.50
SOC Car Sticker	£ .75
Keith Brockie Eagle Print (limited stock)	£20.00
SOC Field List	£ .75
SOC Checklist	£ 1.25

Proposed ban on the shooting of Capercaillie

The Scottish Office has consulted the club, among other organisations, over this issue. Members who have extensive experience of the species agree that a ban would be worthwhile. Apparently some estates have been operating a policy of voluntary restraint but others have not. The proposed ban will ensure that all will fall into line with what is generally considered a sensible policy given the decline in numbers. We have also made the point that research is needed to establish why the giant grouse have been doing so badly.

Community Nature Grants Scheme

NCC is making available £500,000 worth of grants to local community groups and voluntary bodies to carry out nature conservation projects in town and city areas. The Community Nature Scheme aims to support those involved in urban nature conservation by providing grants of between £500 and £5000. As well as encouraging the conservation of existing fragments of wild land and other sites of wildlife or geological interest, such as Local Nature Reserves, canal sides and disused railway, the Scheme is designed to stimulate the interpretation of features to help in the understanding of nature conservation and enjoyment of wildlife. One of the objectives of the Scheme is to widen nature conservation activity and awareness by reaching smaller local voluntary organisations and community groups not currently reached by NCC programmes. Where projects make use of voluntary labour it may be possible to fund 100% of material costs. Anyone interested and considering applying for a grant may find it useful to discuss project details in advance with the Scheme coordinator or their contact at a NCC local office.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 June for the September number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00	
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00	

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SOC Notices

Scottish Centre for Ornithology

To the surprise but considerable relief of the Management Committee the local authority agreed in March to allow the former secretary's flat to be rented out as offices, though only on condition this was to a bird charity such as RSPB. Even this concession only came about after the Committee provided a strong case to both councillors and officials for the Club to be an exception to what is one of Edinburgh's strictest planning policies; returning the Georgian New Town to residential use. Previous advice from experts had been that such an application would be turned down and this had also been the message when an exploratory approach was made to the Planning Department a few years ago. Negotiations were immediately begun with RSPB Scotland which will lead to the Club receiving a rent well above what the Bookshop was making even in good years. The lease is likely to be for not less than five years with the option of extension. As RSPB will continue to have their main office and postal address at 17 Regent Terrace there is no question of the SOC losing its identity. This is particularly good news for the Waterston Library which can now expand using former Bookshop shelving rather than have to contract to fit in with new offices or move to another institution. Council is grateful to Ian Darling for all the work and expertise he has applied to our premises and to all the members who lobbied the authorities on the Club's behalf. Members must appreciate that there are still some drawbacks over remaining in a listed building in a conservation area, notably higher than average repair bills.

The premises have already seen an increase in use for meetings by organisations such as the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, RSPB, Nature Conservancy Council and Isle of May Trust as well as routine meetings of SOC Council, committees and discussion groups and FIBOT.

Ruby and Jimmy Smillie

As this issue went to press we were shocked to learn of the death after a very short illness of Ruby Smillie who was our Membership Secretary for 20 years until 1983. Ruby was an Honorary Member of the Club who, with her husband Jimmy, continued to take an active interest in its affairs after her retirement. They were a very close couple and Jimmy collapsed and died a few hours after Ruby's funeral. A full appreciation will appear in due course.

Staff changes

Maureen Williams found that she could not combine even part time work with her family responsibilities and resigned with effect from early March; ill health also meant she had not been able to be in the office as much as she would have wished. We are grateful to her for her hard work on the Club's administration. We are also grateful to Sylvia Laing who has been doing the job of Membership Secretary and a good deal else, to Fiona Slack who helped out long after finishing as Bookshop Manager and to Sheila Horsburgh who has undertaken to finish off arranging next winter's syllabus of talks. Our slimmed down administration could still benefit from someone with managerial skills or aptitudes willing to come in part time to take on the accounts, forward planning of things like talks and conferences and allow Sylvia to get on with the day to day running of the SOC. The position is ideal for a recently retired person, sympathetic to the aims of the Club, keen to stay active and meet lots of people. For further details write to the **Management Committee (Secretary), SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.**

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 1990 (£20 1st, £10 2nd) were:
January: D.C. Jardine, Hexham and Miss W.E. Dickson, Alnwick.
February: Mrs J.D. Watson, St. John's Town of Dalry and P.C. Wood, Newstead.
March: M.J. Everett, Huntingdon and Mrs B. Gray, Glenrothes.

As this issue of *SBN* goes to press, the 200 Club starts its second year. In the past year, to the end of May, the SOC has been provided with a new Hoover (the previous one was new in the 1960s!) and some much needed carpeting. Additionally 22 members have received prizes totalling £360 (two lucky members won a prize twice!). The SOC is very grateful to 200 Club members for this support.

There was a boost to membership at the Spring Conference, but there are still vacancies. Do please join and give yourself a chance to win a prize in the monthly draw, and at the same time contribute to the refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace. It only costs £1 per month. Please write to me for details of payment by Banker's Order, or send a cheque for £12 (made payable to "SOC 200 Club") to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (Tel: Melrose 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

SOC publications

A reduction in the number of papers being submitted to Scottish Birds and the feeling of Council that the Scottish Bird Report really should be something members get as part of their subscription have led us to change SB to one issue per year. This means that in 1990 it will appear in December ie no June issue along with this magazine. The 1989 SBR will also appear at the end of 1990 and be sent to all members. We anticipate that the two publications will have more pages than the two issues of SB do at present. In future they will not appear in the same month. Members should also note that several SBNs have been increased from 12 to 16 pages.

1990 Raffle

The 1990 raffle is being run by Tayside Branch. Offers of prizes or help please to **Ian McIntosh, 23 Rattray Street, Monifieth, Dundee** as soon as possible. Please support us and make an equally good success of the raffle in 1990 as Borders Branch did in 1989.

Arran, Bute and the Cumbraes

Bernard Zonfrillo, 28 Brodie Road, Glasgow G21 3SB, has taken over as local recorder for these islands from Ian Hopkins. Thanks to Ian for his work over the years.

Nominations for Council

These should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 31st July.

Thanks

To Josie Buchanan, Margaret Bell, Rosemary Davidson, Mrs Livingstone, Sheila Stewart, Ian Balfour Paul, John Ballantyne and Bill Harper for packing the last issue of this magazine.

Aberlady footbridge

This popular landmark, destroyed in recent storms, will be replaced in its present position. Plans to move it upstream have fallen through.

CBC help wanted

Carol Houston from Hermitage of Braid Country Park in Edinburgh would like assistance with a Common Bird Census this summer. Contact her on **031 447 7145.**

Scottish Ringers Conference

The 15th annual conference of bird ringers in Scotland will be held at the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar over the weekend of 17-18 November 1990. Programme and booking forms can be obtained from **Jeremy Wilson, Department of Zoology, University of Edinburgh, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JT.** Ringers resident in Scotland will be sent details with the B.T.O. Autumn extra.

SBRC Election

Last year the Scottish Birds Records Committee publicised their intention to commence rotational retirement in order to create an annual vacancy on the committee. Roger Broad is due to retire in November 1990 and we invite nominations to fill the vacancy created. Nominations should be submitted to me by 31 July 1990 and signed by both a proposer and seconder who must both be SOC members. It is the intention of SBRC to propose a nominee to ensure that at least one person stands for election each year. To fill the vacancy being created this year the Committee's nomination is Ken Shaw, who lives in Kincardineshire and is a very experienced birdwatcher. If further nominations are received, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SOC Local Recorders will be invited to vote. As this is the first opportunity for club members to nominate candidates for the committee we hope that it will generate sufficient interest to force a ballot.

Ron Forrester, Secretary, S.B.R.C., 1 Kirkdene Grove, Newton Mearns, Glasgow G77 5RW.

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Birds

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1990 No. 19
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Mike Ashley
and Sylvia Laing

The 1990 Breeding Season

Yet another mild winter should have benefited many resident birds and an increase in several trans-Saharan migrants suggest an improvement in wintering conditions elsewhere. But it is Scotland's non-Passerines, especially her seabirds, which are internationally important and some of these are in serious trouble.

Weather

Winter was almost frost free but unusually windy with exceptional rainfall in the west and a continuing drought in the east. A pulse of warm air in mid-March led to a very early arrival of summer migrants and some early breeding. Reasonable weather in April-May was followed by a cool June which adversely affected many species.

Voles out of step

Short-tailed Vole numbers were up in some areas, with Barn Owl clutches of nine noted in Dumfriesshire as a consequence. Further west, in Galloway, where there were fewer voles at the start of the season, numbers of Barn and Short-eared Owls, Kestrels and Hen Harriers were all down. On Orkney, where the Common Vole is less prone to cycles of abundance and scarcity, good numbers of Short-eared Owls were reported but Hen Harriers had a poor year, perhaps owing to a shortage of adult male birds. Merlin numbers were up there but in the dry Lammermuirs their fortunes were mixed and one site was totally destroyed by muir-burning. Dave Dick reported that almost every Peregrine nest on grouse moors in SE Scotland had eggs taken, but on unmanaged moors they were untouched.

Seabirds in trouble

The problems besetting Shetland's seabirds – a run of disastrous breeding seasons linked to the availability of sandeels – are now well known and it is distressing to report that no reprieve is in sight, despite some half-hearted measures being taken to limit the fishery. Arctic Tern numbers were only half those of last year with an 80% decline since 1980 and chicks were again dying in the nest. Shags, Arctic Skuas, Razorbills and Kittiwakes were also affected and Pete Ellis's report that Herring Gulls were scavenging Shetland streets in midsummer may suggest that they, too, are in trouble. Gannets and Cormorants, which feed on a variety of fish species, seemed to be doing satisfactorily although more dead chicks than usual were seen.

On Orkney, some species seemed to be breeding successfully at the time of writing (mid-July); extensive mortality of Arctic Tern chicks were not clearly related to sandeel shortage, bad weather and skua predation also playing a part. Further south, numbers of most seabirds in the Firth of Forth were stable with an increase in Cormorants, a recovery in Sandwich Tern numbers on Inchmickery and a further rise to 500 pairs of Common/Arctic Terns on the Isle of May. There are worrying signs here too, however, with exceptionally low breeding success in terns, Kittiwakes and Shags on the May and chicks often left unattended at the Dunbar Kittiwake colony, whose productivity last year was the highest recorded in Britain.

Red Kites *Eric & David Hosking*
Obviously not taken in Scotland this year this scene is what RSPB and NCC hope for in the future following the arrival of another consignment of Swedish Kites which arrived in Scotland in June courtesy of RAF Kinloss. Swedish conservationists agreed to supply up to twenty young birds following the success of 1989 when six were released in Scotland. Although one was later found poisoned the others survived. Poisoning has also killed young Kites in England where British Airways flew in young birds from Spain to provide genetic variation. The young Kites spend their first five weeks in quarantine before release at secret locations. They all carry wing tags and miniature radios to monitor their movements; this helped track down the gamekeeper responsible for one of the poisonings and he has been heavily fined.

Waterbirds and waders

A widely reported decline in Dipper numbers is worrying. As an early nester, it is particularly prone to flooding, and acidification of waters may also play a part, especially in SW Scotland. Grey Wagtails and Common Sandpipers, summer migrants which share a similar habitat, show no consistent trend. Kingfishers are especially vulnerable during freeze-ups and the slight increase noted in eastern Scotland is expected. The drought there was responsible for local decreases in Coots and Moorhens but midsummer flooding affected Black-headed Gulls and Great Crested Grebes on Lothian Reservoirs. This is a census year for Mute Swans and a huge increase since 1983, noted on Orkney, is allied to the spread of Canadian Pondweed on the lochs. The decline in Lapwings in some areas can be attributed to drainage and the increase in winter cereals – the crops are too tall for the birds to see over in spring – but this is not the full story as reductions were also noted in areas where the breeding habitat seems unchanged. Perhaps the problems may lie in the wintering areas. This may also have some bearing on decreases in Curlew and Snipe populations, although the complete absence of the latter as a nesting species in 1990 at sites such as Aberlady Bay is certainly attributable to the low water table.

Summer migrants

Numbers of breeding Sand Martins seemed to be up in Nairn and Lothian but slightly down in Tayside; the population is still well below that of the mid Sixties and a national SOC survey seems desirable now that fieldwork for the New Atlas is complete. Although Swallows seemed scarce in some parts, Eric Meek reported that the population was as high as ever on Orkney. Redstart, Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler, species particularly affected by droughts in their wintering quarters, also showed signs of a comeback in several areas. Other warblers showed little overall change but Henry Robb noted a mid-June resurgence in singing by Wood Warblers in Perthshire and suggests that many nests may have been flooded out. Lesser Whitethroats are still spreading and consolidating their breeding range and, at least in some areas, are no longer the elusive, silent bird recorded only by ringers and Reserve Wardens. Losses and gains are well-matched in flycatchers; the provision of nest-boxes at Roslin Glen, Lothian, led to an immediate resumption of breeding after a long absence by Pieds but in Glen Trool, Galloway, the combination of noisy, hungry young (bad weather) and lack of voles (hungry weasels) led to heavy predation of these hole-nesters.

Other songbirds

An increase in Wren numbers was widely reported – James Brown noted a 300% increase in his Ayrshire farmland site – but Donnie Macdonald, censusing in Sutherland wood, commented on a decrease. The picture was similar for Song Thrush although this time it was James whose decrease was against the general trend! Increased usage of inland sites by Stonechats was reported in Galloway and Grampian but recolonisation of Lothian is slow. Long-tailed Tit numbers, although up on the mid-80s, still have some way to go before reaching those of 1975. Production of young can be very high, with a brood of ten in Angus not particularly unusual, but predation of whole clutches and broods is also common. Coal, Blue and Great Tits were reported in reduced numbers at several sites but decreased productivity last year is the probable cause. Finches generally, and Chaffinches in particular, bred in better numbers than in recent years and were fairly successful. In Glen Trool, early successful breeding of Siskins and Crossbills was associated with a heavy spruce cone crop.

Thanks to James Brown, J Calladine, Dave Dick, Peter Duncan, Colin & Rosemary Edwards, Pete Ellis, Stephen Fulford, Mike Harris, John Hunt, Jay Hurley, Alex Joss, P J Knowling, Donnie Macdonald, S Moy, Eric Meek, Brian Meath, Ian Poxton, Stan da Prato, Henry Robb, Geoff Shaw, Ken Shaw, Marion Shimeld, Bob Smith, Iain Taylor and Derrick Warner.

Peter Gordon

As always we stress that fieldworkers' first impressions are not to be interpreted as the definitive account of season 1990. That comes later when the appropriate bodies have analysed all the data. Many of the contributors to the summary you have just read are participants in the Common Bird Census or the Waterways Bird Survey organised by the BTO with backing from NCC. The results of these monitoring schemes are presented in a new book ***Population Trends in British Breeding Birds*** *which covers 164 species and is one of the most useful ornithological publications of the year. It is available for £12 post free from the BTO at Beech Grove, Tring, Herts HP23 5NR.*

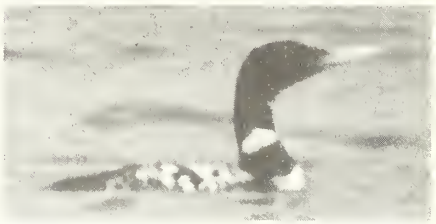
Lurchers' decision

A major threat to the Cairngorms' wildlife from skiing has been removed by the announcement by the Secretary of State for Scotland who has ruled that proposals to extend mechanised skiing to the west of Cairngorms, particular Lurchers' Gully, are inappropriate because of the national and international nature conservation and heritage importance of the area.

The SOC which, with other bodies including RSPB and SWT, has consistently opposed the proposed development, welcomes the decision. Conservationists accept this was a difficult issue to resolve and hopes it will end the long debate over skiing and conservation in the Cairngorms and that the proposed Cairngorm Management Plan will encourage parties to work together in the years ahead.

Recent Reports

Rather cool weather and northerly winds dominated the period except for a few days in early May when temperatures soared. For many breeding species spring came late and, with the cool wet weather continuing into early summer, it was a relatively poor breeding season for many species from **Golden Eagles** to **Red-necked Phalaropes**. In Shetland the weather added to the problems of continuing food shortage for many seabirds, producing their seventh successive breeding failure. Easterly wind were scarce during spring and there were no large falls of migrants. The most amazing bird of the period was the **Pallas's Sandgrouse** at Hillwell from 19 May for several weeks. The vast majority of the 500 or so birders who saw it were very well behaved and avoided straying onto crops. All of us who saw it are grateful to the farmers and crofters who allowed us onto their land to see this remarkable bird.



White-billed Diver *Bobby Tulloch*

The Whalsay **White-billed Diver** remained into May, with a second bird appearing off Yell in June. The reapparance of the Hermaness **Black-browed Albatross** at the end of March for the first time since 1987 came as a great surprise, but after the first few days it put in only sporadic appearances. Sightings of a **Great White Egret** at three widely spaced localities in the Highlands could have involved between one and three individuals. A **Black Stork** was on Sanday and a **Spoonbill** at Aberlady. Unusual Geese included a **Been Goose** on the Ythan and a **Bar-headed Goose** in Shetland, perhaps from the feral population in Sweden. A pair of **Mandarins** were at Upsettington, an **American Wigeon** at the Hirsel, a **Black-Duck** at Loch of Spiggie and there was an influx of **Garganey**. There was a **Ring-necked Duck** at Aviemore, **King Eiders** in Shetland, Orkney and between the Don and the Ythan, a **Black Scoter** at Dornoch, **Surf Scoters** off Bressay, Murcar and Gosford Bay. **Ruddy Ducks** were seen from Shetland to the Borders.

There were **Hobbies** from Shetland to Skateraw. Magnificent white **Gyr Falcons** were seen in Shetland, Orkney and on Islay. Although **Quail** were scarcer than last year there were still more reports than usual. Good news came from the Western Isles where **Corncrakes** were reported to be in higher numbers.

Unusual waders included an **Avocet** on the Ythan, the first record of a **Stone Curlew** in Orkney, **Little Ringed Plovers** at Aberlady and Dunbar, an **American Golden Plover** on Fetlar, several **Pectoral** and **Curlew Sandpipers** and an influx of **Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits**. The rarest wader was a **Marsh Sandpiper** at Cotehill Loch in mid-May. **Red-necked Phalaropes** were late returning to Shetland with the first seen on Fetlar on 30 May, but one put in an appearance at Lochwinnoch earlier.

Long-tailed Skuas were seen on Fair Isle and Orkney. Shetland's first **Franklin's Gull** was at Hillwell in May and single **Little Gulls** were reported from Orkney to St. Abbs. A **Ring-billed Gull** was at Kirkwall and **Yellow-legged Herring Gulls** were seen at Virkie, Kirkwall and Ullapool. The **Pallas's Sandgrouse** at Hillwell stayed long enough for a veritable army of twitchers to see it. Two female **Snowy Owls** remained on Unst and Fetlar and a male was seen on Fair Isle. A **Nightjar** was seen at Kelso, 2 **Bee-eaters** at Vidlin, a **Hoopoe** at Mid Yell, about 4 **Wrynecks** on Fair Isle and another on Stronsay.

Fair Isle produced 2 **Short-toed Larks**, whilst a **Red-rumped Swallow** was at Sumburgh. Fair Isle also had **Tawny** and **Red-throated Pipits**. A **Thrush Nightingale** wa seen on the Isle of May. Amongst the scarcer warblers were 3 **Marsh Warblers** in Shetland, 3 more on Fair Isle and another at Dunnet Head and Lothian's first **Great Reed Warbler** at Aberlady. There were several **Icterine Warblers** in Shetland and Orkney and, more unusually, a **Melodious Warbler** on Fair Isle. The only **Subalpine Warbler** was on North Ronaldsay. A rarer find was a singing male **Barred Warbler** in Scalloway. A male **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was seen on Fair Isle.

Golden Orioles and **Red-backed Shrikes**, appeared in good numbers. A **Great Grey Shrike** was in Orkney and a **Woodchat Shrike** was on Flotta. Scarcer finches included an **Arctic Redpoll** on Fair Isle, **Common Rosefinches** in Shetland and Orkney, a **Bullfinch** at Stromness and single **Hawfinches** in Shetland and on North Ronaldsay. One of the most memorable aspects of the period was the huge influx of **Common Crossbills** into the Northern and Western Isles, with quite large numbers reaching the Highlands. The main arrival began on 3 June. Total numbers must have reached several thousand birds: the largest flocks reported being 60 at Kergord, 126 on Rousay and 80 on Hoy, with many lingering in the islands into July.

One of the most perplexing birds of the spring was the male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** which appeared on Fair Isle after a westerly gale on 26 April. No records of this species have yet been accepted into category A of the British List as there is always a suspicion of caged origin.

Pete Ellis

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Island Holidays, Ardross, Comrie, Perthshire PH6 2JU. Tel: 0764 70107

Bird mortality on North-Eastern Scottish beaches in the spring of 1990

When I found an unusual number of dead birds on the beaches north of Aberdeen in March 1990 I was surprised because it was said to have been a mild winter and few appeared to be oiled. At first I assumed that other people would be investigating them but when it emerged at the BOU annual conference in Aberdeen in early April that the NCC have left beach surveys to the RSPB, who discontinued them in 1985, with the result that apparently nobody had even noticed the mortality south of Orkney and Shetland, where it followed the January and February gales and included unusual numbers of Razorbills *(Shetland Bird Club Newsletter 81)*, I thought I had better investigate it before the evidence was all destroyed, and made five beach surveys over the next six weeks. By this time many of the bodies had been turned inside out by gulls and were disintegrating or buried in sand, but the initial total of nearly 16 birds/km. was still much higher than used to be expected in international beached bird surveys at the peak of the winter mortality. Although it had fallen by half a fortnight later and to a fifth the week after on open beaches there were still many old bodies in sheltered bays in May. Most of the dead birds were large auks similar to the local breeding populations, and while most of the more sedentary Guillemots were still in winter plumage with small bills and were presumably immature, half the Razorbills, in which the immatures are stronger migrants, were adult. As in the past *(Scottish Birds* 5: 104-107) some auks also had long wings falling within the range of the arctic races and had presumably been brought in by the gales. The measurement of the only Little Auk wing, 139 mm, falls at the upper end of the range for the species, so it must have belonged to the large, high arctic race *Alle alle polaris*. One of the two Puffins was also very large, outside the range of 3,019 British birds cited by M.P. Harris in *The Puffin* (1984), and approaching the mean for the large arctic race *Fratercula arctica naumanni*. There were fewer large northern Razorbills than in the Skagerrak disaster in 1981, (*Seabird* 11: 28-46), and most of the Guillemots also resembled the intermediate local population, though there were a few large, heavily-marked northern birds and pale southern ones.

The factors affecting Scottish seabirds likely to be responsible for this mortality were discussed by M.P. Harris and R.S. Bailey in a contribution on ''Seabird populations and fish stocks'' to the BOU conference (*Ibis* in press). It appears that the recent breeding failures widely attributed to overfishing for sandeels *Ammodytes* sp. in the summer seem less likely to have a permanent effect on bird numbers than a parallel failure of sprat *Clupea sprattus* stocks also thought to be partly responsible for the disasters affecting auks and Kittiwakes in the winter in the early 1980s, whose effects evidently still persist. Since the loss of adult birds has much more serious implications than a failure to breed it seems time that more attention was paid again to what can be seen on our beaches in the winter.

W.R.P. Bourne

Bird bodies found on north-eastern beaches in the Spring of 1990

Date	15/4	29/4	6/5	13/5	15/5	Total	Wings: range (mean) in mm.
Km.	6	7	7	2	1	23	
RT Diver		1				1	283
Fulmar				1		1	337
Shag		2		1	1	1a/3i	260-273 (268)
Eider	1					1	301
GBB Gull	3	2	1			6 (1a/4i)	430, 460
Herring G.	1	2	3	3	2	8a/3i	393-420 (407)
BH Gull	1	1				2a	286, 288
Kittiwake		4		4		7a/1i	296-315 (305)
Little Auk		1				1	139
Razorbill	28	11	3	2	5	49 (7a/7i)	180-202, 211 (192)
Guillemot	58	31	15	26	28	158 (11s/50w)	184-215 (198)
Puffin	2					2	148, 178
Total	94	55	22	37	36	244	
Birds/km	15.7	7.9	3.1	18.5	36	10.6	

Observations: 15 Apr. Balmedie – Newburgh, 29 Apr. Scotstown – Rattray, 6 May Don Mouth – Balmedie, 13 May Cruden Bay, 15 May Nigg Bay; a – adult, i – immature, s – summer plumage, w – winter plumage.

Puffin *Mike Ashley*

Red Tides and other phenomena

The recent closure of shellfisheries off East Scotland and North-east England due to an outbreak of toxic algal blooms often called Red Tides has had much public attention. They can cause death in mammals, including humans, who have eaten contaminated shellfish, which tend to concentrate the toxins due to their feeding methods. They are also toxic to seabirds and in the past declines in Shag populations on the Isle of May have been linked to Red Tides. The Forth River Purification Board has analysed water samples for the presence of the microscopic organisms responsible for these Red Tides in the Firth of Forth. These organisms called dinoflagellates are naturally present planktonic algae but under certain conditions form large blooms. The recent mild, wet winter and calm, warm spring conditions have enabled the blooms to be formed. Only very low numbers of these potentially toxic red-tide organisms have been found in the coastal waters of the Forth.

Blooms of other planktonic algal organisms have, however, been found. In particular, one such organism, called *Phaeocystis* has been found in large numbers along the Fife and Lothians coasts west of a line from Fisherrow to Kirkcaldy. As with the other blooms, the mild winter and good spring conditions have provided excellent growing conditions for *Phaeocystis*. Large blooms of *Phaeocystis* are relatively rare in Scottish waters as they are often related to the enrichment of the waters by nutrients. The nutrients come from land run-off and sewage discharges. As such, these blooms are more common in the enriched waters of other parts of the North Sea, such as those along the Dutch and German coasts. However, *Phaeocystis* does occur in most years in the Forth but only in low numbers in most years.

Phaeocystis is not toxic and does not pose a threat to marine life although it may eventually form an unsightly scum on the water and foul nets and ropes. The colonies of the *Phaeocystis* are embedded in mucous which, when the colonies age and die, decays into a surface slick turned to foam by water movements and wind. In Dutch waters, this foam has been found several feet thick on beaches. Each year the River Board receives and investigates inquiries from the public over these post-bloom surface scums which trap other particles and which are easily mistaken for sewage.

The organism is related to the organism *Chrysochromulina* which produced blooms in the Baltic Sea and the eastern North Sea in 1988. The latter blooms were so large that, at the end of the bloom in restricted waters such as the Baltic, fish were killed through lack of oxygen. This will not be the case in a well-flushed area with relatively low nutrient concentrations such as the Firth of Forth.

Algal plankton blooms form part of a well-recognised natural sequence. They are followed by large numbers of microscopic crustacean animals and then by jelly-fish and comb-jellies taking the crustaceans. In some years the large crustacean populations can produce 'milky water', due to wax from the animals, as happened in 1975 and 1980.

The price of mink

Thirty to forty years ago, North American mink were imported to Britain to be bred on fur farms. Many escaped, and their wild descendants are living and breeding along rivers and coasts over large areas of the country. As mink continue to spread through the British Isles, their impact at gull and tern colonies in west Scotland is beginning to become serious. Longer term effects on populations of these seabirds cannot be predicted, but some large changes have occurred already.

Evidence of predation

I scramble ashore from my inflatable onto a small island near Mull. This is the largest colony of Common Terns in the British Isles, with over 700 pairs. I look around in horror. Over a hundred dead terns are lying on the grass, on the rocks, and stuffed into hollows in the seaweed. Most of them are recently fledged juveniles, just over a month old, well fed, healthy, and appearing uninjured. Close examination under the feathers reveals one or two very fine, deep puncture marks in or near the ear cavity. Often the wound is scarcely visible and too slight to bleed.

Heavy predation by mink is not always so obvious. Certainly mink often kill far more than they eat, but the evidence is often removed by the mink's habit of caching (hiding) much of its surplus kill, and later by the activities of gulls, crows, maggots, burying beetles, and by the tides. One can visit a formerly thriving colony of gulls or terns and find it empty a few weeks later, apart from a few decomposed remains, with nothing to indicate that a mink has killed all the chicks. In three of the four cases below, all of which occurred on small, rarely visited islands off the coast of Argyll, I happened to be present within hours of the kill. If I had arrived a week or so later I would have noted that the birds had deserted, but there would have been few clues to the intervening drama.

Common Tern chicks and juveniles killed by Mink *Clive Craik*

Case 1 26 May 1989, first visit of year to Common Gull colony of 10-12 pairs in Loch Creran. The only overt signs are reduced or zero clutches, and adults behaving in an unusually listless manner. No dead adults, but a search of the small island reveals 61 eggs hidden in groups of three to seven. Normal clutch size is three, but these birds have responded to egg removal by laying five or six eggs per pair. Twenty of the hidden eggs are intact except for two to four almost invisible (0.5 – 1mm wide) punctures in the shell, consistent with being carried in the canine teeth of a mink. Within 24 hours, I have trapped and killed this egg-specialising mink, a male. Egg predation largely ceases, but breeding has been so disrupted that no chicks are reared.

Case 2 7 June 1987, first visit of year to colony in Loch Craignish with 148 pairs Black-headed Gull, 49 pairs Common Gull, 32 pairs Common Tern, 11 pairs Arctic Tern and two to four pairs Black Guillemot. Here the activities of mink are more obvious. Sixty adult Common Gulls and nineteen adult Black-headed Gulls, killed but uneaten, are scattered over the island, some cached in groups of two or three, some lying in pairs by their intact nests and clutches. All have been killed by a bite to the neck or the back of the head. This mink is specialising on incubating adults but eating little of what it has killed. Search reveals a den on the island, within thirty metres of the Common Gull colony. Here I trap and kill a female mink and two small young, and the predation abruptly ceases. The female's canines are so worn that she was clearly incapable of inflicting the needle-like punctures delivered by younger mink. One of the young has dragged the remains of an adult Common Gull out of the mouth of the den, the contents of which are otherwise inaccessible. Mink were seen, and considerable predation of the seabirds was noted, at this colony in the breeding seasons of 1985 to 1989 inclusive. Breeding success of the terns and Black Guillemots was consistently near zero during these years, with several adults killed, while that of the gulls was reduced but variable.

Case 3 A tern colony of about 104 pairs (Common and Arctic, about three to one) on a small island in Loch Linnhe. In 1989, nesting here took place in two waves. From the first 34 clutches, I recorded 36 larger chicks growing and fledging successfully by the end of July, with no signs of predation. Now the second wave of chicks from the later 70 clutches, mostly of Common Tern, are half grown. On 10 August, as I approach the island to check on their progress, something is obviously wrong. Adult terns are flying in an agitated manner above something moving in the vegetation. I can see an adult flying above and settling by its dead mate and chicks. I catch a glimpse of a mink moving nearby. I land. Only two live chicks remain. Seventy four chicks and nine adults are freshly dead. Almost all are uneaten, and each has a telltale needle-like puncture in or near the ear, so fine that only a tiny drop of blood oozes out. The mink moves in front of me through the vegetation, where forty of the dead chicks are hidden. Within 24 hours I have trapped and killed the mink, a male, but the colony is now deserted.

Case 4 the largest British colony of Common Terns (772 pairs in 1989, including about 33 pairs of Arctic Terns). In July, a mark-and-recapture method suggested there were about a thousand large chicks, most of which fledged by the end of the month. On 1 August a mink has arrived shortly before I do. At least 129 juveniles and chicks, and three adults, are dead, killed exactly as in Case 3. The tide may have washed many more dead away. Only three unfledged chicks remain alive. I fail to catch the mink. A few days later the colony is deserted.

The two island colonies of Cases 3 and 4 are respectively 2.5 and 1.6 km from the mainland. There are anecdotes of mink swimming 5 km offshore. These distances suggest that mink will eventually spread to many islands and islets of the British Isles, including Orkney.

Widespread predation

Mink predation of tern and gull colonies is almost certainly more widespread than is suspected at present. Cases of poor or zero breeding success at nearshore colonies may be due to mink without this cause being obvious so it is difficult to say what proportion of colonies are affected. It is also too early to say what effect this new and intense form of predation will eventually have on seabird numbers. However, it is already obvious that many small tern colonies on islands close to shore, recorded in west Scotland in Operation Seafarer (1969-70) and in some cases in the early eighties, have now been deserted for several years. Instead, five new large colonies have appeared, all of them more than a kilometre offshore. Their sizes, 100-800 pairs, are much larger than any recorded here

in the earlier years. It looks as if terns have responded to mink predation in two ways – by combining into much larger colonies, and by moving as far offshore as they can. Moving offshore may reduce the chances of attack by mink, but unfortunately it doesn't eliminate it (Cases 3 and 4). But being in a large colony (Case 4) reduces the percentage damage and increases the chance of survival of each individual chick.

Terns at risk

Mink have been studied closely by scientists at Exeter University and elsewhere. One of their conclusions was that, although birds could form an important part of mink diet, healthy populations of most bird species were probably able to withstand this additional predation. However, they warned that the effects of mink at dense ground-nesting seabird colonies might be more severe, and their study areas generally did not include such colonies. Terns seem to be at particular risk. Firstly, they nest much more densely than gulls. Secondly, tern populations always seem to exist on a knife-edge; whole breeding seasons are regularly lost through bad weather or food shortage. Mink seem likely to have appreciable effects on this fine balance. Thirdly, terns are smaller than gulls and easier prey for mink. The larger gull species, such as Herring and the Blackbacks, are probably too large for mink to attack easily, although I have indirect evidence of egg removal by mink at several Herring Gull colonies.

In the above cases, it is discouraging that the mink was caught **after** serious damage had been done. Experience suggests that mink tend to ignore baited traps if large numbers of chicks are available. The only solution seems to be systematic trapping in and around important colonies in spring, before the birds have returned. This will be difficult in remote and sparsely populated areas.

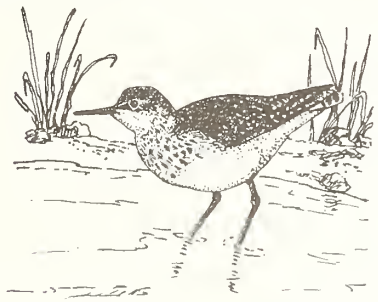
J.C.A. Craik
Scottish Marine Biological Association

Curse of the Creature from Kinneil Kerse

Kinneil Kerse SSSI is one of the most important bird sites and most frequented bird watcher haunts in Central Region. Several years back Dave Bryant documented the outstanding ornithological interest of this area in his article *Birdwatching in the Forth Estuary* (SB 11; 78-82). British shorebird and wildfowl populations have their ups and downs but Kinneil still remains of international importance for Shelduck and Knot and national importance for Great Crested Grebe, Teal and Redshank. Most other common estuarine species occur in reasonable numbers. During autumn passage, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Greenshank regularly turn up. Nowadays the latter two species are often present throughout the winter.

The SSSI comprises a large area of intertidal mud and a single small lagoon separated from the former by a sea wall. The wall is breached by a series of pipes which allow the rising tide to inundate the lagoon slowly and "lagoon high tide" lags c. 3 hours behind the official Admiralty time. The whole area is backed to the west by the Grangemouth petrochemical complex and to the south by a sewage farm, agricultural land and, most importantly, Falkirk District Council's key landfill refuse disposal site.

Until intervention by the Secretary of State last August the lagoon was being actively infilled with refuse. Although the lagoon comprises only 2% of the land area of the SSSI it is one of the key wader roosts in the upper Forth, it offers shelter to the ducks during stormy weather and also offers additional feeding time at high tide. This latter feature possibly ensures the continued presence of internationally important numbers of Knot and other birds in this area. The frenzied feeding of several thousand Knot and Dunlin long after high tide on such a small patch of mud is quite a spectacle.



Green Sandpiper *Steven Brown*

Predictably, Falkirk District Council objected to the recently implemented Kinneil Lagoon Nature Conservation Order 1989 on the grounds of infringement of their rights as owners, as planning authority and as waste disposal authority and the outcome was another conservation v development public inquiry.

John Hunt has recently given a graphic account of the mechanics of such an event (SBN 17; 4-5) .... ours was to be held at Falkirk District Council Chambers in February of this year. As the Kinneil area is heavily industrialised and not renowned for scenic beauty there was no public outcry at the potential loss of a small area of mud for the birds. The supporters of the order primarily represented various conservation bodies coordinated by the NCC whilst the objecting District Council had the support of British Petroleum *(what happened to their "go green – feel great" image?)* and the Regional Council.

In theory the cases for and against should have been argued on conservation grounds ..... after all it was a nature conservation order that was under dispute. However, the District Council did not really challenge the conservation evidence presented by Caroline Crawford (NCC), Dr David Bryant, Prof Peter Evans and a range of supporters. The bulk of the three day inquiry comprised varying interpretations of planning law and mans's utilization of the site. In the 1920's the Forth Conservancy constructed a low earth bund along the line of the current sea wall in an attempt to increse siltation prior to reclamation for agriculture. A narrow strip of reclaimed land alongside the Grangemouth – Bo'ness road is still farmed, most has been swallowed up by the petrochemical industry. The District Council considered that their landfill operation was the "natural" culmination of 65 years of man's reclamation activity. The difference between crops and rubbish seems to have been temporarily overlooked! Their case hinged on the Council's, and their predecessors, land use rights. If they could demonstrate that the land was being used as a rubbish dump in a planned and systematic manner prior to the implementation of planning law in 1948 then their development rights were more or less exempt from planning permission and should take priority over the statutes of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The NCC had taken great pains to assemble and interpret all aerial photographs of the area, ranging back as far as 1946. These clearly showed no signs of tipping in the disputed area prior to 1948, though some reclamation and spoil tipping had taken place to the east around Kinneil Colliery. Reclamation by rubbish infill has taken place by means of partitioning the estuarine and lagoon area behind the sea wall into "cells"; some of these had planning permission, others had not. The NCC's evidence on planning matters showed that refuse tipping has not been as systematic as the Council maintained, and although their intention had always been to infill and reclaim the whole area behind the line of the 1920's bund, this had not been set down in documentation.

The Council argued that to apply to themselves for planning permission was a rather pointless exercise. Several other points should also be considered in their favour. As owners of the site, it was absurd that they had to object to a conservation order put on their land by the Secretary of State on behalf of another organisation (NCC) preventing them from doing their job. Alternatives to dumping at Kinneil include a greater degree of recycling and use of a disused inland quarry. As both options were neither developed nor ready for immediate use they were not considered realistic options and they would incur increased costs. Also, by building and maintaining the present sea wall, it was the Council that had created the 5-star accommodation for the waders and ducks in the first place! Okay, the Council's water engineering does allow prolonged feeding opportunities for the birds at high tide; however the amount of mud concerned is only a tiny fraction of what used to be available in pre-reclamation times.

At the end of the day the conservation importance of this site on an otherwise very developed estuary could not be challenged. The arguments over established user rights and planning units were equivocal. Good news came through from the Secretary of State on 14th May: the conservation order will continue and the current prohibitions on refuse infill on the SSSI will remain in force. I for one will tolerate poll tax increases if some of the money is going to conservation ends, albeit indirectly, by forcing district councils to consider waste disposal alternatives to land infill!

Let us hope that conservation bodies will now seize this opportunity to creatively manage this SSSI. The area is very sensitive to human disturbances. Observation hides and screening will be needed to prevent birdwatchers themselves causing disturbance. With a little foresight, Kinneil Kerse can become an even more important site for shorebirds.

Steve Newton

Abernethy Forest

The native pinewoods of Scotland are one of our greatest natural assets and of enormous appeal to nearly all who know them. They are living monuments to the past, uniquely rich in wildlife and set amongst some of the finest scenery in the Highlands. Once covering vast areas they are now reduced to less than one per cent of their former extent and losses from forestry activities have continued until very recently. Over the years organisations and individuals have worked hard to awaken public concern and find ways to conserve the remaining fragments of these wonderful old woods.

Gradual acquisitions

The RSPB unwittingly became involved with pinewoods in 1959 when Operation Osprey was set up at Loch Garten to protect the first pair of Ospreys that had returned to nest in Scotland. Loch Garten is in the heart of Abernethy Forest, the largest remaining area of the native pinewoods, situated on the northern slopes of the Cairngorms just a few miles to the east of Aviemore.

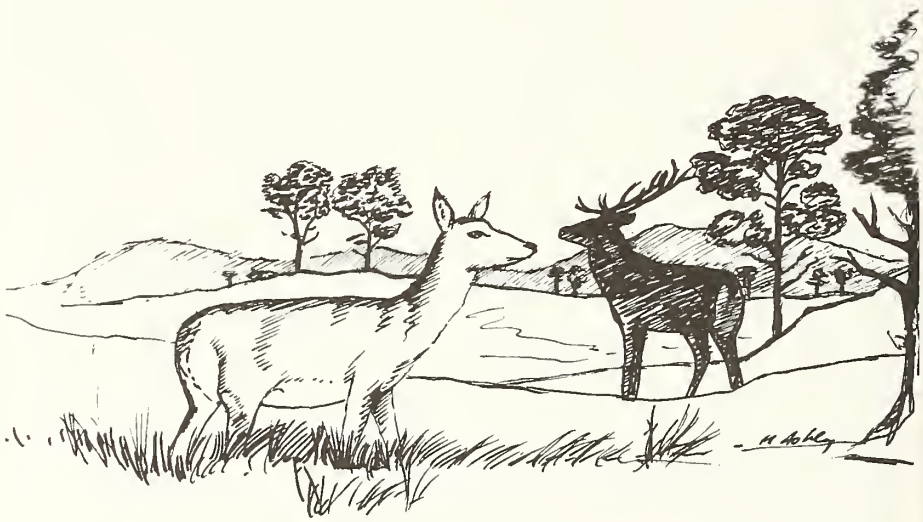
Involvement with the Ospreys showed us that the surrounding forest was also important for a marvellous range of other wildlife; birds, plants and insects, which were dependent on this special habitat. However it wasn't until 1975 that it became possible to buy the first area of land around Loch Garten. Fifteen years later, after seven separate purchases costing in total over £3.5 million, a land holding of nearly 31,000 acres has been put together. This stretches fourteen miles from Boat of Garten at 700 feet above sea level to the summit of Ben Macdui at 4,300 feet, and comprises the largest nature reserve in Britain owned by a conservation body, containing extensive tracts of mountain and moorland in addition to the pine forest. Most of Abernethy Forest is now within the reserve, some 7,000 acres of pine woodland. Of this nearly 4,000 acres are natural in origin, that is the trees have not been planted and have descended by natural regeneration over the last 8,000 years since pinewoods first colonised after the last Ice Age. The remaining 3,000 acres have been planted in the last 60 years, fortunately mostly with pine of local provenance. However these plantations tend to be uniform in structure and lack the mix of other trees and shrubs such as birch and juniper which are a feature of the more natural woodland.

We know from historical records that the whole of the forest has been exploited for timber for at least 400 years. Probably none of Abernethy is now entirely natural though some of the more remote areas with 'granny' pines over 300 years old may come close to that ideal.

Management planning

Starting from a point when the forest has been so profoundly influenced by man what do we now do with it, especially when it contains several million pounds worth of timber?

Records show that in the past the forest was much more extensive, extending to the south over what is now heather moorland. At one time pine would have reached up to a natural tree line at perhaps 2,000 feet with juniper and willow scrub going even higher. Today a natural spread of the forest is prevented by too many deer, especially Red Deer, which concentrate in large numbers in winter around the edge of the forest and eat out any young seedling trees. This is the problem afflicting nearly all the native pinewoods and has become more serious in recent years as the Red Deer population in the Highlands has built up to record levels. As the Red Deer Commission repeatedly point out this is because sporting estates are not shooting enough hinds. Not only do the deer prevent the pinewoods spreading but they eventually destroy the woods as the old trees die and none can take their place.



Red Deer in Abernethy *Mike Ashley*

At Abernethy we decided early on that a major aim would be to regenerate the forest so that it could again spread back to its former extent. This can only be done by reducing the grazing pressure to a level at which enough seedling trees can survive and this means a substantial reduction in the Red Deer population. This is now underway using our own stalker, and we shall carefully monitor deer numbers and the effects on vegetation and trees. It will probably take several years before deer numbers are reduced to the right level and it will be many decades before we really see the forest spreading. However in the very long term there is the exciting prospect of more than doubling the present area of forest and restoring a natural gradation of vegetation cover from low ground forest to dwarf shrub heath on the high tops, something not seen anywhere in Britain today.

To some there may seem a contradiction in a conservation body shooting deer on a nature reserve. However, when the arguments are fully explained, most people do accept the need to control deer if they are not to destroy their environment. Eventually a larger forest will provide a healthier habitat for deer where they do not starve to death in large numbers during severe winters, as happens now.

Forest structure

There has been a lot of discussion about what should be done with the existing 7,000 acres of woodland and, while the details have yet to be decided, some general policies have been agreed. It was felt that there were no good conservation reasons to touch any of the 4,000 acres of natural woodland and that it would be best to leave this to develop without interference, thinning itself out naturally to create the important dead wood habitat which is so important for wildlife including birds like Crested Tits. With deer numbers in balance with their environment new generations of trees, pine and broadleaf, should gradually come in to provide a more varied age and species structure than that inherited after many years of forestry management. The conservation arguments for a hands off approach won over those suggesting that the valuable timber should be harvested in a sustainable way to provide income.

However, with the extensive plantation areas there is clearly a need for a more interventionist approach to restore a more natural structure, especially to the younger plantations before they lose a lot of their present conservation interest. Work of this kind has already been done at Loch Garten where heavy thinning of young pine has been carried out early enough so that future natural development should eventually result in a forest that will be hard to distinguish from one of natural origin.

Another important consideration with the areas damaged by recent forestry is to restore natural water tables by damming forest drains. Where this has been done already it has had encouraging results, recreating forest pools and bogs which are an important feature of the old pinewoods. These have provided breeding sites for Goldeneye and rare species of dragonfly.

Abernethy is a stronghold for the magnificent Capercaillie but, sadly, numbers have declined here, as elsewhere, in recent years. A three year research project has just started on the reserve to find out more about the Caper's requirements and, if possible, to identify habitat management which could help. If so these will be put into effect in the future treatment of the plantation areas.

People and problems

Looking after a large reserve like Abernethy in a popular tourist area such as Speyside means that the interests and problems of people have to be considered as carefully as those of the wildlife. The high mountains are understandably a magnet for walkers, cross country skiers and climbers, but the easy access via the ski car park and chairlift means that numbers on the tops are already causing significant erosion to the fragile habitat. Too many birdwatchers could also pose problems for some nesting birds. While no one would seriously suggest trying to stop people enjoying these activities, we must do what we can to prevent matters getting worse. The pressure of people in Snowdonia and the Lake District is a frightening lesson as to what could happen to sensitive and popular areas like the Cairngorms.

At Abernethy we have decided that the reserve will not be publicised or promoted to visitors and facilities such as interpretation and paths will be kept to a minimum. Away from Operation Osprey there will be no visitor centre or toilets and no signs to attract passers-by into other areas of the reserve. Visitors will, of course, be made to feel welcome and can go where they like but they should expect to find their own way and do their own thing. We hope this policy of minimum promotion will help to retain the wilderness qualities which the reserve still enjoys and prevent numbers of visitors building up to problem levels.

Public support

For an organisation like the RSPB which depends on public support it is not easy to accept that its largest and most expensive reserve should not be promoted but that has been agreed. Even an article like this could be seen as a form of promotion but it seems permissible to explain what is happening in a journal of this kind.

Existing pressure on the high plateau is an especially difficult problem to tackle because the reason for the easy access (the ski development) lies outwith our control. The recent decision by the Secretary of State not to permit further expansion into Lurcher's Gully is encouraging and it may eventually be possible to move towards restrictions on the summer use of the Cairngorm chairlift. It is also perhaps time that the various hill user organisations started to think of voluntary restraint on the use of the Cairngorms. The Scottish mountains can accommodate more people without problems but not if a high proportion of them concentrate on the Cairngorms.

To own a wonderful area like Abernethy is enormously satisfying. Managing it wisely is a great responsibility and we need the help and understanding of many other organisations and individuals. To achieve the tremendous long term potential of the forest will require a lot of commitment and substantial resources. This will in effect be a huge experiment and must be carefully monitored so that we learn as much as possible from what happens. After the long retreat of our native pinewoods it is heartening to think of one area where they will be on the march again.

John Hunt
Reserves Manager
RSPB Scotland

Capercaillie displaying *Sam Alexander*

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BOU in Aberdeen

The Annual Conference of the British Ornithologists' Union was held at the University of Aberdeen in April. Around 120 members from Australia, Mauritius, North America, Europe and Africa joined a sizeable turnout of home based ornithologists to ponder the future of long-term bird studies.

High quality talks

After the official opening of the conference by David Snow, B.O.U. President, the delegates were treated to fourteen high quality presentations by internationally respected ecologists. Most of these were case histories of long term work while some were addressed more widely to the rationale, context and problems of studying birds over many years. The scene was set, and some hackles raised, by Charles Krebs, visiting from Vancouver. He developed the case for an experimental strategy in long term population studies. We need to identify time trends in ecosystems. We also need to study slow ecological processes, to study long-lived species and to examine the effects of rare events on populations. Quite simply long term studies, provided they are experimental, are essential to solve the major problems of the next century. They do, however, carry problems, not only of a scientific kind but also administrative ones. Krebs expressed a desire for greater standardization of sampling methods in long term studies and highlighted the problems of handling very large amounts of data; though computers now assist the management of large data sets.

A particularly nasty problem is that of replication. Scientists should attempt to replicate their own studies and those of others but how do you go about replicating half a century's work? Another problem is that because evidence is slow to accumulate faulty ideas last for longer. Then there are the administrative hassles. Kreb's argues that in certain cases we should not do long term studies. Controversially he stated that we should not conduct long term studies to monitor the health of the ecosystems. We need, he said, experimental work because monitoring explained nothing as it did not identify mechanisms.

The case for monitoring

The gauntlet was taken up first by Roy Taylor of Rothamsted Experimental Station. An experimental approach was all very well but you couldn't design an ecological experiment to detect phenomena which only became manifest through long term monitoring. Raymond O'Connor, former Director of the B.T.O., now at the University of Maine, also put forward the case for monitoring in the context of long term studies of birds in the U.S.A. There are fewer long term bird studies in the U.S.A. than one might think. The reasons for this O'Connor reckoned to be cultural. In the U.S.A. ornithological projects address very specific questions at the expense of what most of us this side of the Atlantic would view as routine data collection. O'Connor informed us indeed that the views of Charles Krebs were quite mild compared to those of others in the U.S.A. He saw this as a serious problem which had to be solved. The value of monitoring was real and exemplified by results from the Breeding Bird Survey; a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service monitoring programme. For example, data showing a decrease in numbers of neotropical migrants highlighted the problem of tropical deforestation.

Sparrowhawk *Andy Dowell*

In the U.K. of course we don't really need to be convinced of the value of monitoring our bird populations. The B.T.O. have been doing so for half a century, a point made by its present director, Jeremy Greenwood, and Stephen Baillie. It was interesting to hear Greenwood say that B.T.O. data sets were biassed towards the south east of England, where most active B.T.O. members live. One wonders what sort of results would emerge in analysis if there were more data points from Scotland. Some interesting results were disclosed by Greenwood and Baillie's analysis of factors affecting population sizes of common birds over 25 years. For instance, more than half of the variation in common bird numbers in farmland and woodland can be accounted for by weather. In farmland the amount of snow and, to some extent, rainfall in March and April were the major factors affecting population size. A similar result prevailed in woodland although snow was less important here.

Conservation

Much of the B.T.O.'s work is conservation oriented and should become increasingly so in the future. The conservation context of long term studies was elucidated by Mike Pienkowski of the Nature Conservancy Council. He gave an overview of some long term programmes currently supported by N.C.C. Monitoring was crucial. This was so because of the importance people attach to birds and also because birds may be effective biological indicators of the environment's health.

Despite the phobia (O'Connor's word) about monitoring in North America the U.S.A. does have a range of monitoring programmes. James Nichols of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service presented details of waterfowl population monitoring. His organization run several projects. Among them are the Breeding Ground Survey (conducted in May and begun in 1955), a Production Survey (July, 1966), a Winter Survey (January, 1933), a Banding Program (July – September and also in Winter; 1970) and a Harvest Survey involving questionnaire surveys of hunters. All these surveys feed into detailed analyses of population biology which, inevitably, are management oriented. For example the Mallard, whose survival rate is shown to increase with November-January precipitation, winters further north in warm as opposed to cold winters. Such findings are only made through long term, wide ranging study. Myrfyn Owen (in collaboration with Jeffery Black) presented the results of long term goose studies at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. Again using data gathered over a period of 30-40 years we were informed of many aspects of goose biology. Geese in many ways are very easy to study (being big, easy to count, able to be aged reliably, etc) and consequently are the focus of much attention by volunter ornithologists. This is fortunate because the U.K. has an international responsibility for protecting geese. Analyses of goose counts over the years show one thing clearly – that numbers increase after protection measures are introduced.

Woodland birds in Britain

At the other end of the size scale from geese, tits were the subject of a presentation by Chris Perrins of the Edward Grey Institute in Oxford. The timing of Blue and Great Tit breeding bears a complicated relationship with caterpillar availability, but the nature of this relationship has been expertly identified in the course of this well known 40 year long study. There can be few better examples of the value of long term investigations than this which addresses aspects of a whole oakwood ecosystem. Perrins chose to concentrate on how egg laying date was affected by temperature although it could instead be caterpillar availability as, being cold blooded, these depend on warm weather for their development. Warm springs and summers turn out to be bad news for tits as the caterpillars develop really quickly and so become unavailable sooner (when chicks are about 10 days old the adults need to collect around 700 caterpillars a day!). Sparrowhawks, of course, are another great hazard to tits and these were the subject of another excellent account of a long term study (only 18 years long this time!) by Ian Newton. This work will also be well-known by S.O.C. members especially those who attended last year's Annual Conference. In a rather novel approach he presented evidence showing that some Sparrowhawk territories (as opposed to Sparrowhawks themselves) were better at producing young than others. Broadly, these good territories are young (around 20 years old) forestry plantations. As the woods get older the success of birds breeding in them tails off and woods greater than 50 years old are pretty useless for Sparrowhawk breeding. Newton emphasised the prime importance of good vs. bad territories but did concede that bird quality must also somehow be important.

Scottish studies

Newton's study takes place in Scotland and four of the other papers at the conference were devoted to work carried out here. Bob Moss (and Adam Watson) showed, using modelling techniques, that kin selection mechanisms may cause cyclic changes in Red Grouse populations, while still in the uplands Des Thompson showed that kin selection might help when it comes to co-operating in long-term research! In collaboration with siblings Patrick and Maimie he elucidated the reasons why their Greenshank study population had declined since the late 1970's. The deterioration of pool complexes, which are important for Greenshank broods, through erosion by upland vehicles almost certainly accounted for the decline.

Perhaps the best known long term bird study in Scotland is that on Fulmars by George Dunnet and co-workers at the University of Aberdeen. Over 10,000 chicks have been ringed on Eynhallow in the Orkneys. Fulmars are long lived birds and some individual birds have been studied by the same observer over a period of 40 years. One of Dunnet's aims in life is to outlive his birds! He also gave a brief account of bird studies on the Ythan estuary; again S.O.C. members will be familiar with those on the Shelduck and the Eider. Remaining with Scottish seabirds the work of Roger Bailey (DAFS) and Mike Harris (ITE) on seabird populations and fish stocks was of particular interest given the current plight of seabirds in the Northern Isles. The story will be familiar to all and it is good that funds are now available to study the relationship between food availability and seabird numbers. Bailey hyopthesised, with some tantalising inferences, that sprat (as opposed to herring) availability was the root cause of the problem. The importance of monitoring seabird populations became evident here. The fact that the problem was detected early is a credit to the monitoring carried out over many years by the Shetland Bird Club, and highlights the importance of Harris' multi-site seabird population monitoring programme. Stuart Bradley (and Ron Wooller) of Murdoch University, Western Australia also convinced delegates of the value of long term seabird studies in an account of Short-tailed Shearwater population biology. This was based on observations "culled" over a period of 43 years. These birds live in colonies in S.E. Australia and number about 23 million. A staggering 700,000 are harvested each year but fortunately the study population remains well protected.

All in all a most stimulating conference providing much food for thought in addition to much information on individual species. I would recommend readers to attempt to read the proceedings of the conference when they are published.

Jim Reid

Kinnordy success story

Around a dozen pairs of Black-necked Grebes attempt to nest in Scotland each year. The RSPB is therefore delighted that four pairs have reared a total of eight young on their Loch of Kinnordy reserve near Kirriemuir, Angus. Black-necked grebes have occasionally bred on Kinnordy before but never in such numbers. Many visitors to the reserve have been able to see these lovely birds for the first time.

Reactions between Greylag and Canada Geese

Reading the paper by P.J. Shimmings and others (*SB* 15: 162) about populations of Greylag and Canada Geese in south west Scotland I recalled that the Greylag is the ancestor of European farmyard geese and that a big population of European domestic geese disappeared within ten years after 1980 from a big lake in the south of North Island, New Zealand, when Canada Geese (race judged mostly *Branta c. maxima*), occupied their grazing and roosting places. These feral domestics, which flew well, abounded for about a century at that spot. This suggests that Greylags may decrease in southwest Scotland if Canadas increase further unless each species has different needs there for grazing, roosting and nesting.

Hallam Secker

Fulmar *Mike Innes*

Magpies get the blame

Magpies with a taste for fresh milk are being blamed for an increase in gastro-enteritis according to local newspapers in Edinburgh. In several towns in the UK people with campylobacter infection, which leads to diarrhoea, have reported drinking milk from bottles contaminated by birds which have pecked through bottle tops. In Edinburgh, over a two-week period, 11 cases were identified where Magpies were said to be the culprits. The infection causes an unpleasant, though seldom dangerous illness, which lasts an average of five days, with abdominal pains and diarrhoea, perhaps a 'flu-like feeling', with the victim having a temperature, aches and pains and vomiting.

Lothian Health Board is now urging those who have bottled milk delivered to their doorsteps to prevent the tops of bottles being pecked by birds. Any bottles interfered with in this way should be discarded.

This seems to be the first time Magpies have been accused of directly harming people. For years they have been said to damage stocks of game birds by predating eggs and chicks. Recently there has been considerable publicity, often originating with shooting interests, for the idea that increasing Magpie numbers in towns and suburbs will reduce songbird populations. Preliminary findings from a BTO research project do not support this idea. Songbird numbers are much more likely to be affected by habitat quality, food supply and weather than by predation.

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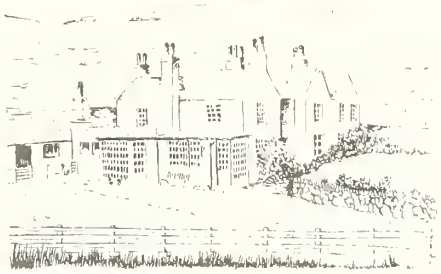


Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £42.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £75.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £10 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
Telephone: Colonsay (09512) 316 – open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

Reviews

Birds by Character; *by Rob Hume, Ian Wallace, Darren Rees, John Busby and Peter Partington; 1990; 176pp; £12.95 hardback, £7.99 softback.*

Subtitled 'The Fieldguide to Jizz Identification', this book must offer something novel if it is to find a niche amongst the plethora of rivals currently on offer to birdwatchers, but does it? Yes, insofar as it concentrates on trying to convey the different jizz of related species rather than describing the fine plumage details. For instance, Knot 'flies in dense, smoky clouds, with amazing manoeuvres' but Sanderling's flight is 'low, quick, direct but not aerobatic'. It is by such differences that the experienced observer will often differentiate between species but to what extent can the beginner learn these from a book, I wonder? Moorhen usually is 'elegant, high-stepping, round-bodied with tail often cocked' but such pointers are not diagnostic as this bird is quite often furtive and crouching and can run like a rodent with tail invisible. Illustrations, by the last four authors, show birds actually doing things rather than the stereotyped portraits beloved of rival guides and generally work well. The choice of species for inclusion is disappointing: American Bittern and Red-eyed Vireo are in, Mandarin and Crested Lark out, so it caters properly neither for Britain nor Europe. With tighter control over the range of species covered, more space could have been devoted to each and a worthwhile idea could have been better developed, perhaps with a similar format to the recent 'Macmillan Field Guide to Bird Identification'. The index is appalling.

Peter R. Gordon

Field Guide to the Birds of Britain & Europe; *by John Gooders; Kingfisher Books; 1990; 480 pp; illustrated by Alan Harris; £10.95.*

This is essentially an expanded version of the author's *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain & Ireland*, published in the same series in 1986. It covers 427 species which occur regularly in Europe (but you will look in vain for most transatlantic vagrants). Each species is allocated a full page including illustrations, text and map plus summary panels of occurrence, identification and other key features. What this approach gains in fuller treatment of the individual species has to be balanced against the loss of immediate comparison with confusion species when they are grouped together on the same page. The result is a deliberate compromise and produces a fairly hefty tone which, the author realises, is more likely to be carried around in a car than in a pocket! One change from the earlier Guide is the author's decision to adopt, for the most part, the standardised English names recently proposed, but not yet accepted, by the B.O.U. Not everyone will rejoice to find Barn Swallow, River Kingfisher and Northern Wren included, let alone the much maligned Bearded Parrotbill. Red Grouse, however, survives unchallenged as the accepted English name for *Lagopus lagopus*.

This Guide can be recommended to anyone birdwatching in Europe, especially for those who liked the format of the earlier Guide.

Donald Stewart

The Manx Shearwater; *by Michael Brooke; T & A D Poyser/Academic Press; 1990; 246pp; many b & w photos, vignettes, tables and figs; £17.00.*

This book is a resume of what's known of Manx Shearwaters based mainly on Michael Brooke's research on the islands of Skokholm and Skomer. It is a very readable account due to the author's informal style and his refreshingly honest approach to thorny problems e.g. ''I am at a complete loss''. It is further enhanced by admirably cautious and thorough interpretation of experimental results, of which there are many. There are also lessons for us all in the use of large amounts of ''routine'' data such as biometric, ringing returns, etc; all handled expertly in building up a picture of the birds' breeding ecology, population biology and movements. There is a fascinating chapter on puffinosis, a disease which afflicts mainly fledglings only on Skokholm and Skomer. Despite much research its cause remains unknown. The test is complemented by many photographs, excellent vignettes by Dafila Scott, figures and tables. These are within the body of the text unlike the usual Poyser convention of lumping them together at the back. I think this is an improvement (for a reviewer anyway!). Much remains to be discovered about Manx Shearwater biology but this book is an interesting summary of the bird's life and I can recommend it to SOC readers.

Jim Reid

The Barnacle Goose *by Myrfyn Owen; Shire Publications; 1990; 24pp; 10 col, 4 b/w photos; £1.95.*

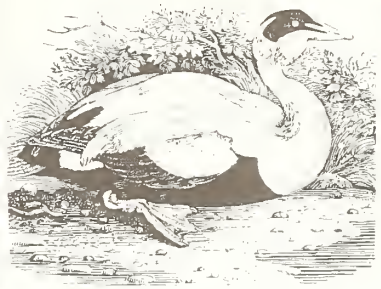
This book, written by a specialist in the study of the Barnacle Goose, is a concise and very readable approach. A considerable amount of information is provided on the movements and ecology, social and family behaviour, the breeding season, population dynamics and conservation of this species. None of this does justice of course to the considerable amount of time and effort expended in gathering the data presented and in thoroughly recommending this book to anyone interested in geese or wildfowl in general I am sure it will provide the stimulation to read further about this species.

Allan W. Brown

Birds and the North Sea; *S.M.D. Alexander (Ed); North Sea Bird Club; 1990; 160 pp; b&w photos, dwgs, figs; no price.*

This is the 10th anniversary publication of the NSBC and a most interesting read for anyone interested in birds using the North Sea or flying over it. Scene setting chapters on the physical features and weather of what is one of the widest areas of continental shelf in temperate latitudes are followed by accounts of seabird distribution and mortality, fish and birds, migration over the North Sea and a checklist of the 206 species recorded by the Club. There is also information on the Club itself and some of the non avian visitors to offshore structures such as insects, bats and marine mammals. Editing has been a little lax and no contact address or price is given; try c/o Aberdeen University Zoology Dept?

Stan da Prato



MAN AND WILDFOWL

Janet Kear

The involvement of humans with ducks, geese and swans is probably closer than with any other group of birds. This involvement in its many aspects is the theme of a compelling and readable account by the Assistant Director of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. Dr Kear ranges widely, through the history of domestication, to wildfowling, decoys, conservation and captive breeding.

July 1990, 280 pages
ISBN: 0.85661.055.0, £17.00

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compiled by the Nature Conservancy Council and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The various Red Data Books prepared by the IUCN and ICBP have set the standards for recognising birds close to, or at risk of extinction worldwide. This book, by focussing on vulnerable species living in or visiting Britain, sets out to define the British situation and to clearly establish both the importance of British populations and our own responsibilities for contributing to bird conservation. Illustrated with over 100 drawings by Ian Willis.

November 1990, 300 pages
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SOC Notices

Subscriptions

All organisations have to regularly review what they ask their members to contribute and the SOC has held its sub unchanged for three years. However inflation is rising again and we are improving services by increasing the size of SBN, making the SBR free again, reinstating research grants from next spring and encouraging new groups to form such as on Orkney. If by this point you are expecting a demand for more cash I am glad to be able to say we are not increasing the sub for at least another year thanks to prudent management and the sale of the Bird Bookshop. The rent from the upper two floors at Regent Terrace will help in the future once we have used the first of it for some badly needed refurbishment.

Graham Appleton, Hon. Treasurer

New administrator

We are delighted to announce that from August 20th Michael Murphy will be working for us on administrative matters such as conference and syllabus organisation, forward planning and generally helping raise the profile of the SOC and boost membership. Michael is a member of several organisations including OSME, the BOU and the BTO as well as the SOC, reflecting his background as a diplomat and linguist. He expects to be in the office in the mornings, Sylvia Laing continues as Membership Secretary and members' main point of contact with the club.

Green fingers?

Now we are definitely staying at Regent Terracce we need to do some work in the garden. Any volunteers from the Edinburgh area will be most welcome. Work needed is simple grass cutting and keeping the weeds to a tolerable level. We want to make the garden both labour saving and attractive to birds so donations of things like birch, hawthorn, elder, cotoneaster, shrub roses (ones that produce hips) as well as ground cover plants are welcome. Please phone 031 556 6042 before arriving in central Edinburgh with a car boot full of greenery.

Annual Report & Conference Booking Form

Both these should be included with this SBN. If not please contact Regent Terrace.

Winter syllabus 1990-91

Your card should be enclosed with this issue of SBN. The programme of talks was started by Maureen Williams, taken on by Fiona Slack and finished by Sheila Horsburgh, who has just taken over the Chair of Borders Branch and works along the road from us in the RSPB office. Considering all the changes in personnel we are delighted that the syllabus was ready to go to the printer by the end of June. Unfortunately there are two gaps in the Caithness programme; we hope to fill these and will put details in the magazine. Members will see one or two speakers without titles. That is because we persuaded them to talk a few hours before the card went for typesetting and they wanted time to decide on their topic. We are very happy to announce that the SOC now has a Group on Orkney thanks to Colin Corse's initiative and it is in the syllabus for the first time. We are also delighted that our Membership Secretary, Sylvia Laing, is going out to meet the members this winter. She will be bringing a selection of sales items to the branches she visits and will also feature in a double act with Sheila Horsburgh. What this performance involves is unclear but it might be prudent if they are kept away from strong drink until the end of the evening.

Atlas

Please don't delay in submitting Atlas Worksheets for 1990. As this was the final field season it is important that Atlas Regional Organisers get all the data as soon as possible in order that they can get them to me quickly. The sooner they are submitted the sooner they can be sent off for computerisation and analyses begun. A full list of Regional Organisers appeared in SBN 17 but if you are unsure to whom to send your data then just send them to me.

Jim Reid

SOC Photo Competition

Entries to 21 Regent Terrace by 31 October **at the latest** clearly marked with the photographers name. Only wild birds photographed in Scotland are eligible. We are biased against Schedule One species photographed at the nest; we know a Barn Owl won last year but it was a superb black and white photograph taken by someone we knew would never put a bird at risk. We hope for black and white work as it is most suitable for reproduction in *Scottish Bird News*. Colour slides are also acceptable but not colour prints. The first three receive shields and cash prizes: £20 for 1st, £15 for 2nd, £10 for 3rd.

BOU honour George Dunnet

At its meeting in Aberdeen this April (see Jim Reid's article in this SBN) the BOU awarded its Godman-Salvin medal to Prof George Dunnet, Regius Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University. The medal is awarded for distinguished achievement in ornithology and the citation referred to 40 years work on the Fulmars of Orkney as well as 28 years as head of the world renowned Culterty Field Station. George is, of course, an Honorary Member of the SOC.

1990 Raffle

The 1990 raffle is being run by Tayside Branch. Offers of prizes or help please to **Ian McIntosh, 23 Rattray Street, Monifieth, Dundee** as soon as possible. Please support us and make an equally good success of the raffle in 1990 as Borders Branch did in 1989.

200 Club

Winners for the second quarter of 1990 (£20 1st, £10 2nd) were:
April: J.H. Ballantyne, Edinburgh and S. Shimeld, Crieff.
May: A. Anderson, Newburgh and R.D. Murray, Eddleston.
June: Dr M.A. Keith, Edinburgh and Mrs D.I. Melrose, Dunure.

Now read Stan da Prato's letter enclosed with this number. You could be the next winner!

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Sales Items

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SOC Field List	£ .75
SOC Checklist	£ 1.25

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Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 October for the December number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:
Adult £12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00
Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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Edited by Stanley da Prato
Assisted by Mike Ashley
and Sylvia Laing

Auld Reekie's green corset

Whatever may come of the well publicised plans to build a new stadium for Heart of Midlothian FC on Edinburgh's Green Belt they have focused public attention on one of our more cherished planning strategies. The debate so far has been on the advantages or otherwise of allowing the Green Belt to be breached. Clearly many citizens feel that it should not but too often for reasons which are unsustainable if we look critically at what the Green Belt does and does not do for wildlife.

The Green Belt isn't some sort of Scottish Serengeti, nor are threats to it comparable to those to tropical rainforests, to quote two of the many letters the *Scotsman* published on this issue. It isn't even a particularly easy place to get in among the countryside if we exclude areas such as Holyrood Park which are rather good for wildlife but not part of the green corset round the city which is what the fuss is about.

Man made

The Green Belt is principally agricultural land which means it is a man made landscape. Its prime achievement has been to prevent unbroken urban sprawl in central Lothian. It certainly looks, at least when not yellow with oilseed rape or barley, green enough but is this really the best we can do in the ecologically aware 90's?

Modern farmland is productive but a poor wildlife habitat. I once surveyed over 1500 hectares of Lothian farmland, including part of the Green Belt on its east side, to see what birds lived on it (*Scott. Birds* 13: 203 – 215). Birds turned out to be around twenty times less numerous on farmland than in woods while the difference between the worst farms and the best habitat, an area of scrub, was even greater. A main reason for the disappointing numbers on farms was the poor quality of so many of the hedges while the woods were also too often made up of alien conifers and Sycamore to be ideal for birds. Even open ground birds like Lapwings were scarce on intensive arable fields. Some farms have more birds than others and these tend to be the less intensive ones. Within the Green Belt areas of rough grazing on the South side and well wooded estates like Dalmeny stand out as habitats with more wildlife; happily they also look better to the human eye.

Natural regeneration

However some of the best wildlife habitat in or near Edinburgh isn't on farmland at all but on sites where industry has finished and nature reasserted itself, often with little or no help from planners or conservationists. Canals, disused railways, old coal and shale bings and other "waste ground" often hold species that find arable farming inhospitable. These aren't our Premier wildlife habitats but they are towards the top of the Second Division. They teach us that we can create more useful habitat rather easily provided we know what sort of plants, animals and landscape we want. They remind us that, left alone, most of lowland Scotland will revert to broadleaf forest without anyone planting a single tree, though the composition of that forest will include species not present when wolves still roamed Scotland. If we don't want forest then we simply manage the land to give whatever intermediate stage is required be it grassland, scrub, open woodland or some combination.

Redshank *Edmund Fellowes*
First prize in the 1990 Club photographic competition; more details on p 11

Nature and people

However the Green Belt isn't a nature reserve. Can it do more for nature and also involve people? Of course it can if we bear ecological history in mind. That means more woods and water than we have now but planned to allow people to enjoy the land in ways that still provide income for its owners. Golf courses, horse riding, angling are obvious ways to do this. More controversially could be shooting and off road driving. The common factor with these activities is they call for little or no cultivation and, especially, chemical spraying compared to arable farming thus allowing more native plants to grow. Food and timber production need not cease but should be carried out in more imaginative ways. For example how about allotments for all the townsfolk without gardens; Wester Hailes alone must have many who would welcome the chance to cultivate a small piece of the barley field Wallace Mercer and David Murray want to build over. This would, of course, look untidy, perhaps the Cockburn Association would object, but it would get ordinary poll tax payers and voters onto the ground while in among the little huts and vegetable patches more birds, butterflies and wild flowers will flourish than in barley. This brings us to an important point: planning procedures are rather better at stopping initiatives than starting them and planners' ideas of what is "acceptable" are themselves often value judgements. In the not too distant past councils have tried to turn allotments into rather sterile parks and many of them still waste resources on "tidying" or landscaping scrub to the detriment of its wildlife and the bramble pickers, dog walkers and others who, along with naturalists, have learned the value of such places.

In Edinburgh's case a Green Belt Initiative has been set up and it seems a Trust will soon be formed to co-ordinate the interests of land owners, local authorities and other parties. A report has been commissioned from SWT on wildlife interest in the Green Belt which looks a useful document although rather stronger on botany than ornithology. Further developments are awaited with interest.

Stan da Prato

Shetland seabirds

Another disastrous breeding season for seabirds in Shetland was briefly mentioned in the last SBN. We can now give more details.

For the seventh successive year Arctic Terns have had an almost total breeding failure and birds such as Arctic Skuas, Kittiwakes and Puffins have raised few young. The isolated island of Fair Isle, not as badly affected in previous years as other parts of Shetland, has experienced its worst ever breeding season. Arctic Skuas raised only three chicks, 400 pairs of Arctic Terns raised only one and Kittiwakes failed to raise any young.

A shortage of sandeels, the staple diet of many of the Shetland seabirds, is being blamed as the immediate cause of the disaster, although reasons for the decline in sandeel numbers are unclear. Fishing was halted in June, the second successive year fishing has been stopped halfway through the season. Conservationists are calling for a complete ban on Shetland sandeel fishing to enable stocks to recover.

The severity of the seabird breeding failure has prompted the RSPB to launch a Seabird Disaster Appeal aimed at raising £400,000 to fund research into the disaster, to purchase and manage seabird reserves throughout Britain, and fight for new legislation to protect the marine environment.

The figures

Seabird breeding results in 1990 were collected by the RSPB, NCC, Aberdeen and Glasgow Universities, Fair Isle Bird Observatory and Shetland Ringing Group. Details are as follows:

Arctic tern – the Shetland population of 8,000 pairs in 1990 was 75 per cent lower than in 1980 and 50 per cent down on 1989. At 133 colonies surveyed only one chick was reared. On Fair Isle, 400 pairs raised a single chick.

Arctic skua – in 1986 the Shetland population was 1,912 pairs, 61 per cent of the British population. This year, at 11 colonies monitored, 255 pairs raised only 28 young. At Papa Stour 89 pairs produced no young and none were produced from study colonies on Mainland and Fetlar. On Fair Isle 104 pairs raised only three young.

Great skua – the Shetland population in 1986 was 5,647 pairs, 76 per cent of the British population and 43 per cent of the world population. On Foula, the largest colony in the northern hemisphere (2,500 pairs), numbers have declined by six per cent since 1986 (see Foula article).

Kittiwake – most colonies on east, south and south-west coasts failed completely. North-west colonies did better but with 0.5 young per nest still produced fewer chicks than in a normal year (1.0 young per nest).

Puffin – breeding results, although better than in 1988 and 1989, were still poor. At Sumburgh 73 per cent of a sample of 22 chicks fledged and at Hermaness 58 per cent of a sample of 24 chicks fledged. Adult birds fed primarily on rockling and gadoids, with only small numbers of larval sandeels being taken.

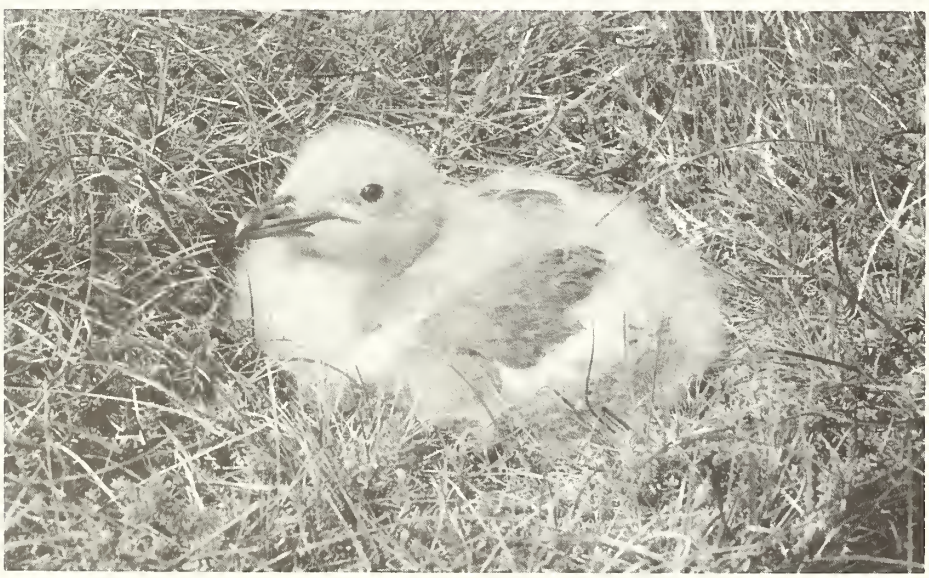
Fulmar, Great Black-backed Gull, Shag, Razorbill – all suffered a poor breeding season.

Pete Ellis,
Shetland Officer, RSPB

Fieldwork on Foula

In 1990 Glasgow University continued observations of seabird numbers, breeding success, diets and ecology as done over the past 20 years. In particular studies of the maximum diving depths of Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins, which were started in 1989, were developed in 1990 to examine the striking differences in breeding success and diets of these species since the decline in sandeel availability. Some provisional results are given here; it is stressed that many of these are parts of long term studies and the full picture will only be complete after more detailed analysis.

Red-throated diver This species had its lowest success and breeding numbers since the population increased in the 1950s. Chicks hatched around 25 June at all four sites, and the two that died disappeared before they were a week old.



Skua chick on Foula *Bob Furness*

Fulmar Many Fulmars lost eggs or small chicks in early July. Adult weights were rather less than the means recorded in 1976-89. In 1990 we obtained 50 regurgitated food samples; 64% were of whitefish, 20% were of offal, 12% were of zooplankton, 4% were of sandeels. This diet composition is similar to that found in 1989 and indicates an enormous increase in consumption of small discards, which were generally ignored by Fulmars in the early 1980s. Foraging trips during the chick-brooding stage were predominantly of 48-60 hours duration.

Gannet In 1990 there were about 220 nests. Viewing difficulties make an exact count difficult but the numbers are well up on c160 nests in 1989. Breeding success appeared good, with chicks in most nests. Large numbers of Gannets flew past Foula and were presumably fishing south-west of Foula and commuting back to Hermaness.

Shag Cast stomach linings were collected to examine the diet of Shags. Most contained mainly sandeel otoliths, although the July pellets seem to show a more varied diet. Otoliths have yet to be sorted and counted. Shag numbers appeared, subjectively, to have decreased further. About 30% of nests examined on 10 July were empty, presumably having failed. Of those containing chicks mean brood size was 2.14, which is very similar to previous years. This indicates that brood reduction is not occurring to a pronounced extent, but total nest loss seems now to be higher.

On our January visit we counted only a tiny fraction of the number of Shags to be seen at Foula in summer, and this suggests that winter migration may possibly have increased.

The feeding areas used by Shags were recorded. Almost all Shags from the west of Foula fed to the south-east of the island but further inshore and north in July. Depth recorders were retrieved from 12 adults and it is hoped that data from these and from pellets may indicate where the birds were foraging in the water column and how diet related to the changes in areas used in July.

Eider Counts of Eiders were made by a Brathay expedition visiting Foula. Eiders have now almost completely deserted some areas. As in 1989, we found several (a minimum of 7) females eaten by Bonxies.

Arctic Skua Several territories that had been occupied in May were deserted by late June and, as adult attendance was low, we may have missed a few territories where both adults were at sea. There were probably over 100 but less than 110 territories in May when numbers were at a peak. Thus breeding numbers have fallen by about 20% since 1989 and dramatically since the late 1970s. The clubs of nonbreeding Arctic Skuas have now been empty for several years. It appears that there is an extreme shortage of immature birds to provide recruits.

Very few Arctic Skua chicks survived. Most died shortly after hatching and many pairs failed to hatch eggs. Territory attendance by adults was extremely low all season. It was not uncommon to find both adults away from the territory even when they still had eggs. Probably one chick fledged successfully before 20 July. On that date we estimated that about 10 chicks were still alive

but most were over a week from fledging and are quite likely not to have survived.

The fact that Puffins and Razorbills were carrying fish (albeit in small numbers) probably did not help Arctic Skuas much as the prey being carried were generally small. Arctic Skuas probably find it difficult to identify victims carrying very smalll fish and the energetic reward in stealing a very small fish is almost certainly inadequate for Arctic Skuas to sustain a chick. We saw remarkably few chases by Arctic Skuas but have no reason to believe that they were feeding by any other means.

Great Skua A count in early July gave a total of 2340 territories on Foula. This is a decrease of 155 territories since 1986. Numbers of nonbreeders attending clubs have fallen more, which may reflect an increased adult mortality and recruitment rate, since poor breeding success began in 1987 and will only just be starting to affect numbers of potential recruits. Diet studies showed large amounts of sandeel in the diet in May and early June but this disappeared in late June. Many goose-barnacles and otoliths of flatfish, which Bonxies used not to eat when discard availability was high, suggest that Bonxies were short of preferred prey in late June. Many pairs lost chicks shortly after hatching but those which survived were fed predominantly on mackerel in July and put on weight fast. Presumably the mackerel was stolen from Gannets but it is possible that Bonxies may have been able to catch these at surface shoals. Overall breeding success of Bonxies was probably about 0.4 chicks per pair but this is a provisional 'guesstimate' which will be refined once nest histories have been analysed.

Undoubtedly chick production was higher than in 1988 or 1989, with much less cannibalism. Nevertheless, adult attendance was only marginally above 1.0 per territory from hatching through to 20 July. Even during incubation, Bonxies were less aggressive than normal, more difficult to nest-trap and spent long periods away foraging.

Gulls Seven pairs of Common Gulls, one pair of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 11 pairs of Herring Gulls and 19 pairs of Great Black-backed gulls were located in June. Most Common and Herring gull chicks disappeared. Numbers of nonbreeding Great Black-backed Gulls loafing on Foula are now lower than ever.

Kittiwake Breeding appears to have been quite late. Much of the low breeding success in 1990 appears due to low clutch sizes, poor hatching success and mortality immediately post-hatching, rather than mass mortality of well grown chicks as occurred in 1987. Regurgitates from adults handled in June were mainly sandeels, but in July we obtained whitefish, offal, euphausiids and sandeels.

Arctic Tern There were about 115 pairs of Arctic Terns on Foula on 22 June. Almost all had given up their breeding attempts by then but a few pairs raised chicks about half way to fledging. Adults seen carrying fish all had what appeared to be larval sandeels. On several calm evenings almost all the adult terns were to be seen catching insects over hay meadows.

Guillemot As with other species, breeding was very late in 1990. Although numbers of chicks at colonies were good, though numbers of adults had decreased noticeably since last year, we could easily see that there were far fewer fish being brought to the colony than would be expected. Chick weights were considerably below normal. While Guillemots brought mainly sandeels in June, in July they came in with a substantial proportion of other species of fish. This is the first year on Foula in which the diet has included fish other than sandeels.

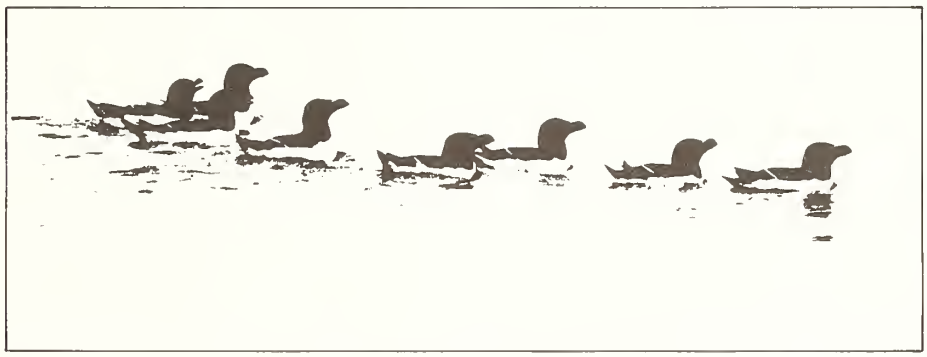
Razorbill Razorbills did better in 1990 than they had in 1988 or 1989. Although numbers are much reduced now, and adults were again carrying very much smaller fish (mainly sandeel larvae), some chicks survived to fledge. 20 depth recorders were retrieved from adults, and showed dives to be considerably shallower than by Guillemots. The poor performance and decline of the Razorbill has, unfortunately, gone largely undocumented but this should not obscure the fact that this species has been very severely affected by the sandeel decline.

Black Guillemot We found no evidence that any Black Guillemots bred successfully this year.

Puffin As in 1987-89, Puffins were less evident than they used to be, and four to six day 'cycles' of attendance were pronounced throughout the summer. Few were seen carrying fish in July and most loads were of very small fish. A wide variety of prey was carried. Several downy chicks were seen to come out of their burrows and wander on the surface; this behaviour probably indicates shortage of food.

In contrast to 1988 and 1989 we saw very few attempts by skuas to steal fish from incoming Puffins. The skuas appear to have given this up as unprofitable. When we left on 20 July Puffins were still coming in with small fish and so some chicks may have survived. Progress seemed slightly better than in 1988 or 1989. 16 depth recorders were retrieved from adults; dives were generally shallow.

R W Furness, Zoology Department, Glasgow University



Razorbills *Bobby Tulloch*

Beached birds on the east coast

On 19 Oct. 1990 following a report from the Sea Life Centre, St Andrews that hundreds of dead and dying seabirds were coming ashore visits were made to local beaches. We called at Sea Life Centre and received little additional information other than several members of the public had been worried by finding dead and dying birds over the previous few days. We picked up about 50 birds, virtually all Guillemot, including two live birds. Two live birds died over night. A further 17 new birds were found on St Andrews beaches over the weekend and 20 on Tentsmuir. All the birds examined appeared to be birds of the year; all appeared to be under weight.

The Seabirds at Sea team at Aberdeen say that hundreds of dead and dying Guillemots had been reported from Aberdeen beaches. They have also been about 50 dead and dying emaciated Gullemots over the past couple of weeks around Lindisfarne.

Dr M.P. Harris of ITE reports that adults largely failed to appear on the cliffs on the Isle of May this October. The Seabirds at Sea team report larger numbers of Guillemots on the transects lately in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea.

There appears to be an acute food shortage on the west side of the North Sea (i.e. sandeels) affecting immature Guillemots. Young Guillemots are accompanied by males until after the moult. Birds have undoubtedly been affected by severe gales over the past few weeks. However it is very unusual to see such wrecks so early in the winter. Similar wrecks in the past have not occured until December or into the new year.

Wrecks of Guillemots in late autumn have been recorded in Shetland in recent years co – incident with failure of breeding Terns, Kittiwakes and Puffins. These also have largely involved birds of the year. Adults would appear to be more able to exploit available food or go further afield; hence the failure of birds to return to the May in October.

There is no British sandeel fishery of the east coast of Britain, but I do not know if stocks are fished by continental fleets. This year we have already seen very low breeding success on the Isle of May for Shag, Kittiwake, Common and Arctic Tern and the lowest recorded production of Puffin young. There have been changes in the attendance pattern of Guillemots which suggests that they have had much greater difficulty finding food, or have had to travel farther than usual to get it.

We may be witnessing the beginning of a marked decline in seabird fortunes on our east coast. There is an astonishing lack of interest being shown by some conservation bodies and Governmental agencies.

Pete Kinnear

Rats and birds on Forth islands

Recently the media have discovered that rats are breeding on Inchgarvie and threatening to disrupt the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Forth Rail Bridge. It is interesting to read that the rats eat 'seabirds, gulls and Kittiwakes' though this is apparently less of a worry than their ability to eat explosives and cable! Much of the media interest was generated by the organiser of the firework display inviting people with pets that could kill rats to a grand rat hunt. The motley collection of terriers and owners that turned up were disappointed as environmental health officials and the SSPCA had stepped in to prevent what would probably have been a large dog fight. Photographers were particularly disappointed that the stripper with the python did not show up; whether due to a more lucrative opportunity elsewhere or the temperature in the Forth, even in summer, was not clear.

In *A Vertebrate Fauna of Forth* (1935) Rintoul and Baxter say that Brown Rats had been recorded from several of the Forth Islands and were still present on Fidra and Inchkeith. The known post-war rat history has no mention of those two islands but has its own poignant memories.

On Inchgarvie in 1951 there were good numbers of Common and Roseate Terns breeding and, in 1952, a fine colony of around 100 pairs of Sandwich, 500 pairs of Roseates and 400 pairs of Common. In 1953 Brown Rats were causing problems, particularly to Sandwich and Common, although 85 Roseate chicks were ringed from c100 pairs; whether all fledged is another story. The following year the colony was deserted. The possibility of rat clearance was discussed but George Waterston was told it was a waste of time as the rats could cross the railway bridge and climb down the ladder. If we had a similar colony of terns today I feel we would take the risk.

Although terns (and Puffins) are no match for rats other species are more able to survive. In 1961 there were 11 Fulmar sites and two or three empty Herring Gull nests on Inchgarvie. By 1988 these had increased to 86 Fulmar sites, 112 Herring, 2 Lesser Black Back and also 20 Eider nests. All these larger species can cope perhaps using a 'saturation' technique where the rats take their share.

A similar episode took place earlier at Eyebroughty where several hundred small terns, including 100 Roseates, bred successfully in 1950 but were 'eaten out' by Brown Rats the following year and have never returned. There too for many years up to 100 pairs of Herring Gulls and c50 pair of Cormorants have bred annually, apparently untroubled by rat predation. On Fidra four tern species had been nesting happily for many years but, in 1972, there was strong evidence of rat damage with broken eggshells, empty nests and whole eggs gathered in small heaps in front of obvious rat holes. A visit later in the year by a pest controller found no evidence of rats and, in 1973, the situation was back to normal. Was there a single animal which died or were there several rats which later returned to the mainland? The latter seems unlikely as rats can live successfully on shellfish and whatever they can scavenge on the shore.

The only other known rat colony on the Forth Islands is on Inchcolm and this is a rather special one. These are Black Rats and their colonisation of the island probably dates back more than 300 years to the years of the Great Plague, the 'Black Death', in the mid-1660s or even earlier. There are literature references to several ships which were infected by various plagues from 1582 (leprosy) onwards being ordered to lie off Inchkeith, Inchcolm or the May and some rats may well have got ashore then. When Brown Rats arrived in Britain in the middle of the 18th century they rapidly increased to pest proportions and the Black Rats, which had till then been a pest species, vanished before them leaving only isolated pockets on some high buildings (the Black Rat is a great climber) or secluded islands. Inchcolm is now an undeclared sanctuary for this 'endangered species'.

Common Tern *Martin Hayes*

Around 1954 some of the displaced Inchgarvie terns, including 100 pairs of Sandwich and many Roseates and Common, tried to settle on Inchcolm with absolutely no success. But again the larger species are more successful. In 1960, 1974 and 1987 there were 3, 8 and 100 Fulmar sites; 1,250 and 1,400 Herring Gull; 0, 10 and 300 pairs Lesser Black Back and, in 1987, 128 Eider nests.

The rat problem is causing no concern on the islands. But it is a sobering thought that the by no means impossible advent of Mink on these same islands could cause problems for the larger species as well as the small seabirds – and even to the rats themselves.

Bob Smith

Planning farce in East Lothian

Readers who recall John Hunt's account (SBN, March 1990) of the campaign to prevent East Lothian District Council allowing a large housing development for rich incomers on one of the few undisturbed stretches of coast left on the south of the Forth will be disturbed to learn that they have ignored the objections of NCC, RSPB, SWT and ourselves as well as the recommendations of a Public Local Inquiry carried out by a Scottish Office Reporter. After several delays and amendments to their proposals Pavilion Leisure have been told by ELDC's Planning Committee that they intend to give permission for 250 houses as well as 150 holiday homes which ELDC claim is a reasonable price to pay for the conversion of a derelict mansion into a country club which will create "several hundred jobs" in an area where the unemployed are rather thin on the ground and where local communities have made it plain they do not want to be swamped in this way.

The adverse effect this will have on sensitive wildlife was thoroughly documented at the public inquiry and the council seemed to have accepted the Reporter's recommendations that development should be limited to golf courses and associated facilities. Objectors were worried that the "develop at all costs" brigade might use this as a loophole to build golfers' accommodation which would eventually become houses for sale. The decision to allow 250 houses on top of holiday units means that ELDC will have to explain to Lothian Region why they have departed from the agreed Local Plan for the area. It also raises serious questions about the planning process and whether local councillors are the right people to take these decisions. Already rumours are circulating that the Scottish Office is concerned at the number of "leisure" developments in rural Scotland which seek to build hundreds of houses in areas where planning guidelines state large scale housing is innapropriate. One ray of hope in all this is that permission is subject to a number of conditions and concerned readers in Lothian should take any opportunity to lobby their Regional councillor or write to the Planning Dept asking that the proposals be "called in" as they are contrary to agreed planning guidelines. The SOC has written to Lothian Region and to the Scottish Office asking for this as has RSPB.

In East Lothian the District Council seem determined to qualify for the least sensitive authority of the year award. They have ignored scores of local objectors as well as the Lothians Branches of SWT and SOC to allow a large caravan park at Seafield Pond, near Dunbar. The pond is excellent for waterfowl and part of the John Muir Country Park, named after the pioneer conservationist who grew up in the area before emigrating to the USA. The Park's Management Committe also opposed the development but to no avail. Needless to say local councillors are happy to greet American visitors and publicise the park as an example of their commitment to conservation.

Stan da Prato

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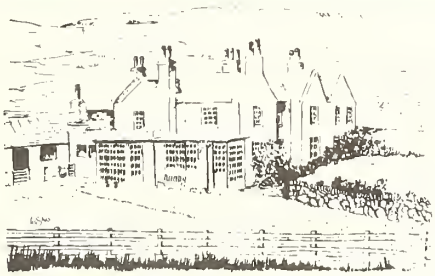

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £43.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £100.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £15 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
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Mallais' Capercaillie

A M Jones recently drew attention to the part albino capercaillie once in the collection of J G Millais (*SBN* 17: p11). This specimen did indeed form lot 198 of the sale of selected Millais specimens at Stevens in 1908. Interestingly the catalogue of the sale notes the specimen was killed at Ballathie, Perthshire in November 1890, while Millais gives the date as October 1889 in his 'Game Birds and Shooting Sketches'. An annotated copy of the sale catalogue gives the purchaser of the birds as a Colonel Mason but its subsequent history has not yet been traced. Although Millais sold thirty-one lots of specimens in 1908 the bulk of his skin collection was donated to Perth Museum and Art Gallery after his death. The collection contains most of the skins used to illustrate 'British Surface-Feeding Ducks' (1902) and 'British Diving Ducks' (1913) as well as other specimens cited by Millais in various books and articles. The data from that collection was recently transferred to computer. Any enquiries regarding the collection should be directed to me at the following address **Michael A Taylor, Perth Museum & Art Gallery, George Street, Perth PH1 5LB.**

Capercaillie conservation

With concern growing about the future of Capercaillie in Scotland the 1990 International Grouse Symposium provided a timely reminder of the value of research in guiding conservation efforts. This meeting at the Norwegian National Forestry Museum primarily considered woodland grouse and was organized by the World Pheasant Association. Although representatives of the Forestry Commission have attended such symposia in the past, managers of Scottish forests were regrettably absent from the Norway meeting.

Significant advances in understanding how to manage commercial forests for Capercaillie have been made at Varaldskogen research station, East Norway. Here Capercaillie spacing behaviour, habitat use, social organisation and responses to felling have been studied over a number of years. Work at Varaldskogen has increased awareness of the dangers of forest fragmentation and failure to maintain sufficient areas of usable habitat for Capercaillie when planning timber exploitation. Norwegian studies also point to the importance for Capercaillie breeding success of invertebrate food for young chicks and high predation pressure.

Capercaillie are often said to be narrowly dependent on natural climax forests and inflexible in their habitat requirements. Little at the Norway conference supported this view. In some East German forests it seems Capercaillie may be gaining ground thanks to the shocking effects of acid rain. Soil impoverishment resulting from such practices as the removal of forest litter for livestock bedding is recognised as having once helped Capercaillie in some central European forests by favouring pine and blaeberry. Clearly in Scotland we need to remember the importance for Capercaillie of the right kind of management to our extensive commercial forests and not just our ancient pinewoods.

There was agreement at workshop discussions on the severe limitations of captive breeding as a conservation technique. An evaluation of a release programme in the German Black Forest over several years concluded this approach was the wrong one and lent support to those who argue that it is wrong to imagine even well planned release experiments will necessarily increase stocks or that it is safe to imagine that future reintroductions can compensate for present habitat mismanagement. Now in the Black Forest attention has turned to studying the use of habitat by the remnant wild population. Problems with release experiments in Scotland were noted at the 1981 Colmar Capercaillie Conference; before chicks were being sold at £100 each for release and eggs were being sought from wild nests for artificial incubation. Although such practices now seem to be gathering popularity there are still those, including hunters, who consider that wild, free living Capercaillie populations should be valued above ones subjected to artificial interference.

Gus Jones

Sand Martin *Steven Brown*

Illegal killing on Scotland's grouse moors

Hen Harriers are rare birds with only about 500 pairs breeding in Scotland, making them almost as rare as Golden Eagles. They breed mainly on heather moorland and were ruthlessly persecuted 100 years ago. On some grouse moors today, harriers are still regarded as pests. Although the Hen Harrier has made a comeback in Scotland this century, persecution is preventing it from successfully recolonising many areas. Every year dozens are shot or have their nests and young destroyed illegally. So far this year, the RSPB has received 16 reports of nests and birds destroyed in Scotland. In 1989 a total of 32 incidents of Hen Harrier persecution in Britain involving at least 85 eggs, young and adults were reported.

An RSPB survey in 1988 showed that harrier nests were three times more likely to fail on managed grouse moors than on unmanaged moors, due mainly to human persecution. In at least a quarter of nest failures one or both of the adults had been killed. Deliberate destruction of eggs and young was found in 12 cases, all on managed grouse moors.

Another eagle poisoned

A Golden Eagle killed by poison has been found dead near a National Nature Reserve managed by the NCC in west Sutherland. The poisoned eagle was found in the Elphin area near to Inverpolly NNR where a Buzzard was also found poisoned in April this year, and where another Golden Eagle was killed in a poisoning incident in 1982. The latest incident has been traced to chloralose poison which had been used to bait dead rabbits. It is well known locally that birds of prey regularly hunt for rabbits in the area where the carcase was found. The matter is now in the hands of the local police.

NCC

Waste company helps Sand Martins

Since 1987 a small breeding colony of Sand Martins in a disused gravel pit in Borders Region, has been studied with the breeding birds and fledged young ringed annually. In each of the years 1987-89 parts of the colony failed due to the collapse, in wet weather, of cliff faces of loose material. However, late in the breeding season of 1989 a new cliff-face was excavated as part of a contract for the Edinburgh by-pass, and this exposed an area of consolidated sand, immediately colonized by Sand Martins, but which did not manage to rear any young before departing for their winter quarters. It was with some initial dismay then, that my attention was drawn to a planning application (approved) by the same company that had inadvertently created the new 1989 face, L & C Waste-Tech of Linlithgow, to infill the site from 1990 onwards.

Fearing the worst for the Sand Martin colony, I contacted L & C in February 1990 to ask if they could possibly spare a small part of the site used by the martins. I received an immediate and positive response from the then Chief Executive who assured me they would do all they could. An assurance re-iterated by a spokesman for the parent company Wistech who have now assumed management for the site.

This worked successfully in 1990 with about 100 nest-holes monitored and 157 different adults and 50 different juveniles handled by Stuart Craig, David Patterson and myself. At the time of writing (mid-August) we have heard that four birds caught at the site but ringed elsewhere in 1989 had come from Lothian (2), Tayside and Tipperary, and we look forward to hearing about the movements of some of the birds ringed at the site in 1990. There was only one very small collapse of part of the colony, again in loose material, but with most nest-holes now being in a firmer substrate the future of the colony looks much more secure.

It is encouraging to note that this co-operation came well before the successful prosecution in England in 1990 of a quarrying company for destroying a Sand Martin colony (reported in the *Times* 19–20 April 1990). We hope that Wistech's co-operation will continue over the next few years until the site is completely filled; the eventual loss of a site, is a factor to which Sand Martins have become adapted, since colonies in the more natural habitat of riverbanks are often lost between and during breeding seasons if the banks are washed away.

Tom W Dougall

Oystercatcher incubating mixed clutch

On 21 April 1990 I observed an Oystercatcher incubating on a grassy area on the lower links at Dornoch, Sutherland. When the bird was flushed the scrape was found to be empty and only partially lined. The habit of incubating on an empty nest is not unusual with certain waders. When the area was revisited on 27 April the Oystercatcher had shifted from the original site, where the scrape was still empty and remained so throughout the breeding season. At the Oystercatcher's new position, which was about 14m from the original scrape, I found a nest containing three eggs of a Lapwing along with one Oystercatcher's egg. Assuming that the Lapwing would have difficulty in incubating such a cumbersome clutch I took away the Oystercatcher's egg. However, on further visits on 4 and 10 May the Oystercatcher was flushed from the Lapwing's clutch of three eggs and, on 13 May, the nest was found to be empty. Tiny eggshell chips were buried in the nest lining which in Lapwing clutches is regarded as successful hatching. Owing to these subsequent events it would appear almost certain that the Oystercatcher was incubating the mixed clutch on 27 April. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any chicks although two pairs of Lapwings were calling in the vicinity throughout the period. The Oystercatcher pair remained in the area until 11 June but, on all my later visits, they displayed no further signs of breeding behaviour.

Donnie Macdonald

Spring migration of Purple Sandpipers through northern Scotland

Up until now there has been no direct evidence of migration of Purple Sandpipers through Scotland. The numbers wintering south of Scotland are small so it is difficult to detect an increase in numbers in spring in Scotland where the wintering population is much larger. However, there has been two recent ringing recoveries of Purple Sandpipers indicating that those wintering in the southern North Sea stop over on migration in northern Scotland before continuing northward.

Firstly, a bird ringed at Buckie on the Moray coast on 17 April 1988 had its ring read by telescope at Scheveningen, the Netherlands, on 25 November 1989. Secondly, a Purple Sandpiper ringed on the island of Heligoland off the German coast on 10 March 1989 was controlled on North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 5 May 1990.

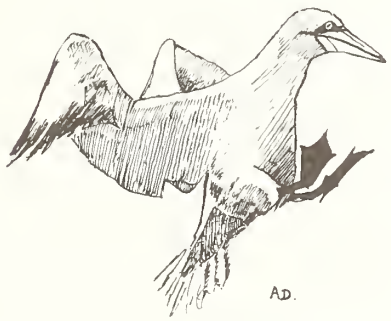
We suspect that these birds are not Norwegian breeding birds, which are known to winter in Scotland, but belong to the population that migrates north-west. The two recoveries fall in line with previous recoveries linking the Netherlands and northern Scotland with Iceland, another stop over place for migrating Purple Sandpipers. We still do not know the final destination of this particular population but Canada is suspected as being their breeding grounds.

R.W. Summers, C. Corse, B. Etheridge, R.L. Swann

Triple brooded Little Grebe

Airthrey Loch is a small 9 ha loch on the campus of Stirling University. It has a large breeding population of waterfowl including five pairs of Little Grebe each summer since 1987. In that year a pair fledged two, two and four young from broods which hatched on approximately 29 May, 13 July and 30 August. In a recent note in *British Birds* (83: 278-279) David Glue described a pair of Little Grebes which fledged seven young from three broods at Aylesbury sewage works, Buckinghamshire, in 1988. *BWP* (vol. 1) describes the Little Grebe as having ''two broods, possibly three occasionally''. This record from Airthrey Loch confirms that it is possible for Little Grebes to be triple brooded as far north as Central Scotland in a favourable season. Also noteworthy was the fact that the third brood was the most successful. In 1987 two other pairs also fledged two and three young from late nests which hatched on 20 and 29 August.

Mike Bell



Gannet *Andy Dowell*

Gannet feeding on bread

Many seabirds feed on discards from fishing boats. Over the last few years on our return journey from the Isle of Canna by ferry to Mallaig it has been our practice to feed the gulls with excess bread. Usually only one or two gulls follow the boat, but, as we commence feeding, a flock of 100-200 large gulls, mainly Herring but with some Lesser and Great Black-backs, quickly builds up. A few other species such as Fulmar and Kittiwake are initially attracted but soon move on, making no attempt to feed. Gannets are also frequently noted. After circling the boat many frequently dive down, close to a group of gulls squabbling over a slice of bread, and surface in the midst of them. Our initial assumption was that the Gannets assumed that the gulls were after discarded fish and they were diving in to get their share. Many of the Gannets quickly move on after a few dives but others, particularly some immatures, are more persistent and make repeated dives. On 9 July 1990, just off Rhum, John Carruthers and myself watched an immature dive and come up amongst a small group of gulls. It made a lunge at a piece of bread which it missed. It lunged again and successfully grabbed and swallowed the bread. Many people regularly feed gulls from the larger ferry boats. Are some Gannets now exploiting a new source of food and if so how common a habit is it?

Bob Swann

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Scottish islands

The theme of the 1990 conference was chosen to inform participants of current developments on some of our more interesting islands, particularly those where birds and people interact. As usual the problem was what to leave out as it was clearly impossible to include them all. The result was a well balanced programme that put the stories of conflict that have dominated media coverage of places like Islay and Orkney into perspective. It would have been difficult for even the most experienced island goer not to glean something they didn't know from the weekend. Fortunately many of the speakers and issues have featured already in this magazine or this summary would be even longer.

Why are our islands important?

To some the answer is entirely personal but for conservation bodies assessments of status are essential. At least before the government decided to split it up the Chief Scientist's Team based at NCC's Peterborough HQ were heavily involved in research on several aspects of our islands. Since so much has been said about unsympathetic southerners giving conservation a bad name among crofters and farmers it was interesting to hear Mike Pienkowski, currently NCC's Assistant Chief Scientist, express his conviction that a redirection of agricultural subsidy was the key to a better landscape, with more in it for locals and tourists, as well as wildlife. He presented a summary of work carried out or organised by a number of scientists who, whatever their accents, had demonstrated their commitment to Scotland in the field, as the frequency with which names such as Bignal, Stroud, Tasker and Webb appear in this magazine shows. Many in the voluntary conservation movement remain to be convinced that the new arrangements, which are still not ready in Scotland, are for the benefit of wildlife rather than a means of toning down policies that go against the government's non interventionist philosophy.

International perspective

From an international perspective Scottish seabird colonies stand out. Many of the most important are on islands. Some are relatively safe provided predators such as rats, mink or even hedgehogs aren't introduced; it isn't too difficult to protect somewhere like Bass Rock or St Kilda. However protecting the food supply of these birds is quite another matter as events around Shetland and now elsewhere (see page 2) make clear. Birds are excellent samplers of the marine environment which return to specific places annually where their condition and breeding success can be checked.

Some islands, such as parts of the Western Isles and Orkney, have exceptional densities of breeding waders. They do so partly because they have low intensity farming systems which are now changing due to EEC farm policy. Intensification leads to a deterioration of habitat with fewer flowers, breeding birds etc but sometimes an increase in numbers of a few species that can take advantage of the improved pastures or crops. This has happened with geese which find Italian ryegrass highly palatable! Since the EEC is hardly short of food and more and more consumers are expressing concern over modern farming methods, it seems very short sighted to try to increase production from what is always likely to be marginal land. NCC has learned from previous public relations failures and now employs artists and others to put across the message that what they are trying to preserve can often be part of a multi purpose land use strategy that involves agriculture, tourism and recreation.

Barnacle Geese on Islay *Morley Hedley*

Reduction in tension

Choosing which of the larger Scottish islands to include was one of the hardest parts of arranging this conference. It was made a little easier as we knew that working on Islay and Orkney were two naturalists who also happen to be talented speakers. Malcolm Ogilvie and Eric Meek gave comprehensive accounts of why they think their islands are the finest of all. Orkney emerged with more seabirds and 76 islands to visit although Islay probably has more species viewable in a day (100 minimum) at any season. More seriously they pointed out that on both islands the tensions that had undoubtedly emerged a few years ago have eased. This has had less coverage than the original disputes; *Peace breaks out over Duich Moss* is not the sort of headline to appeal to the editors of the tabloids, yet the Moss is now safeguarded as a National Nature Reserve and the whisky distilleries on Islay are increasing production. One reason for this improvement is that conservation has begun to bring in money by way of compensation while the success of the RSPB's Gruinart Reserve, where a working farm has improved the pastures, attracted more Barnacle Geese and won prizes at local shows, has reassured local farmers.

Tourism is now one of Scotland's most important industries, nowhere more so than in the Highlands and Islands. The more visitors who want to see wildlife the stronger the conservation case. When wildlife viewing occurs at times of the year when the more conventional trade is slack this is even better. Thus the value of birdwatchers visiting Islay in autumn and winter.

Amateur involvement

Where possible we try to have at least one speaker on Saturday morning who isn't a professional scientist. Bob Swann demonstrated the wisdom of this approach by describing how a keen group of amateurs has visited Canna for over 20 years and gathered invaluable data on changes in the breeding bird communities. Some of these are linked to changes in habitat as trees have been planted and birds like Goldcrests have colonised. Others demonstrate that you cannot assume that what is happening in one part of the country is typical of everywhere else. Canna's Herring Gulls haven't declined like those on the East coast but then they don't feed on rubbish dumps. Other seabirds so far have not been affected in the way they have on Shetland but the fisheries in the Minch are also different.

Bird observatories in the 90's

Places such as Fair Isle and the Isle of May are now part of ornithological history. To begin with this was because students of migration went there to test their theories and

to encounter rarities otherwise out of reach in the days before cheap flights opened birdwatchers' eyes to foreign birding. The heyday of British migration studies was post 1945 when observatories were established almost annually. Then came the radar studies of David Lack and others which found that migration often occurred unseen by observers on the ground. Falls of migrants were due to unfavourable weather forcing birds off course until, exhausted or disorientated, they landed on the first available land. This did not stop enthusiasts visiting observatories but it ended the period of expansion and, more seriously, meant that many scientists no longer accepted observatory data as representative of what most migrants actually did.

New priorities

One result of this was to shift attention from migration to other aspects of natural history that were on the observatories' doorsteps. Both Fair Isle and the Isle of May are important seabird stations and both have become well known for monitoring studies. Due to their very different organisations work on the May has been mainly carried out by professionals from institutions such as ITE, whereas on Fair Isle the staff have often done the fieldwork, much of it now under an NCC research contract.

One of the most important findings has been the differences between seabird colonies. Fair Isle was not affected as early as the rest of Shetland by shortages of sand-eels, though by 1990 it had its worst season on record. On the May seabirds were doing well until much more recently though even the poor 1990 season would be considered good by current Shetland standards.

The current priorities of the three observatories were ably summarised by a trio of speakers who demonstrated how Scottish islands attract people with very different backgrounds but a common enthusiasm.

Valerie Thom first worked on Fair Isle as Assistant Warden in 1955. Since then she has been involved in the island being particularly successful at linking natural and human history and communicating this to a wider public. Fair Isle has always been the Hilton of the observatories, especially now it has its extension. It now calls itself a lodge on its smart promotional literature, subsidised by the HIDB, to encourage more visitors outwith the migration seasons.

Ian Darling has never worked with birds for a living, but, as a successful chartered surveyor, enjoys organising what has been described as "comfortable squalor". The May is an uninhabited island which has never employed a warden, though NCC and other scientific bodies sometimes do, and has no wish to encourage more tourists. It does, however, allow the group in the Low Light to enjoy "their island" for a week which, as there is no access other than by fishing boat, often stretches to more than seven days.

Kevin Woodbridge is a natural optimist; he actually founded a bird observatory when the conventional wisdom said they were things of the past. Already North Ronaldsay has forward looking features such as the use of wind and solar power and the lead it has given in computerising its records. This is essential if all the information so painstakingly gathered by all the observatories is ever to be properly used. Some of it already has been. Laborious manual analysis has led to a series of papers and a BTO guide, the latter jointly written by a previous Fair Isle warden, on the migration seasons of many passerines, mostly summer migrants. More should follow such as the analysis now in preparation of changes in status of migrants through Fair Isle.

Magical moments

Recent conferences have developed a tradition of the final talk being accompanied by lots of good slides which give the departing members a relaxed overview of the conference theme. This year Chris Mylne gave an extra dimension to the weekend by showing pictures, some now of historic interest, of islands that had not been covered in detail such as Foula and St. Kilda, as well as other views of some that were. His point that people like islands because they are small enough to be comprehensible is a good one. Island life has its hardships but a visit to any of these Scottish islands is a relaxing experience even if the journey turns out to be the opposite!

Thanks

To the speakers who were Mike Pienkowski, Malcolm Ogilvie, Eric Meek, Bob Swann, Valerie Thom, Kevin Woodbridge, Ian Darling and Chris Mylne; to projectionists Annie and Don Smith and Chris; to Daphne and Alastair Peirse-Duncombe, Peter Gordon, Graham Clark and their Lothian volunteers for help with organisation; to Ian McIntosh and Tayside for the raffle; to Bill and Hetty Harper for the library; to Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy for all their work and to all of you who turned up to make it another successful weekend by the sea.

SdP

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WAVE YACHT CHARTER is organising a special bird-watching week on the west coast of Scotland from 25th to 31st May 1991 on board its new 46′ ketch.

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CYA

Local Recorders' Conference

The first of what will hopefully be annual meetings of the Local Recorders in Scotland took place in Perth this March. It was felt that the Local Recorders and Bird Report Editors needed a better forum for discussion of many issues than was possible in the limited Saturday afternoon slot during the SOC Annual Conference. In the event about half of the Local Recorders were present, along with several of the teams that help to produce the many Local Bird Reports in Scotland.

The first item on the agenda addressed itself to a final discussion of a Policy Document on Local Recording in Scotland that it is hoped will be adopted by SOC Council as being the framework for the present and future development of how bird records are dealt within Scotland.

Changing circumstances

The SOC is the organisation that coordinates recording in Scotland and produces an annual statement: the Scottish Bird Report. The current situation has evolved over a period of 25 years and as many changes have taken place in that time, notably almost complete coverage by Local Bird Reports and the appearance of other local bird clubs, it was felt necessary to formalise the structure of recording in Scotland and try to iron out some anomalies. It was also thought that it was important to provide a clear list of duties that Local Recorders were expected to undertake.

Clyde Branch had volunteered to produce such a document and Iain Gibson, the principal author, was present to 'fine-tune' some of the final wording of the Policy Statement. One area of controversy was the suggested structure of how the local recording areas, Bird Reports and SOC Branches would relate to one another. It was felt by some that the Statement was imposing a rigid pattern on the country that did not pay attention to local situations and the fact that many areas were either not covered by SOC Branches or were covered by Bird Clubs other than the SOC. Iain reiterated the point that the Statement clearly mentioned that none of the suggested changes would be made without the full agreement of local people. It was up to those on the ground to come to some resolution of the anomalies indicated in the Policy Statement.

Questionnaire

The next item displayed the results of a questionnaire circulated to Recorders earlier in the year about how they organised their record collection, collation and publication. The results confirmed what most of us knew but the survey fulfilled its objective of laying out the various methods and techniques adopted by Recorders to handle an increasingly large volume of records. It was hoped that the survey would highlight good ideas that might be adopted in other areas and prove to be of particular benefit to those starting out as Recorders or producing Local Bird Reports. The survey revealed some interesting information:

Local Bird Reports now cover all but one district of Scotland: Sutherland.

Recorders are increasingly high-tech, many using word-processors and computers to collate and write up bird records.

Most Local Bird Reports break even financially, several lose money (a situation we hope to remedy) and one makes a vast profit!

This item indicated to some Editors possible sources of finance that might assist them to produce better Bird Reports and the possibility that several Bird Reports published by the same printer might produce good discounts. This analysis led on to discussion about a proposed 'Recorders Pack' that might contain most of the documentation necessary for a Recorder to do his or her duties. There was some discussion about the adoption of Local Record Cards that might ease the burden of record handling, analysis and storage. The system used by Dundee & Angus was much admired and could well be adopted elsewhere. There was general agreement that such a pack would be especially useful to newly appointed Recorders. Another area that provoked discussion was the possibility of a standard record card for recording seawatching. It was felt that it was very difficult to handle seawatching data and virtually impossible to make any sense of seawatching observations nationally. A standard card for each hour's observations might help solve some of these problems.

Records and rarities

Bob Spencer, Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, outlined how his organisation handle the extremely sensitive data collected every year from Local Recorders, individual observers and conservation bodies. He stressed the high levels of security adopted and the fact that only three other individuals were ever allowed to see the secret files of the RBBP.

Ron Forrester then described the activities of the Scottish Bird Records Committee. After explaining the rationale behind the list of species considered by the Committee he expressed concern about the rejection rate for some species, such as Rough-legged Buzzard, that consistently failed to be adequately described. In the discussion that followed Ron praised the diligence of local record committees and Recorders who acted as a screening process for the SBRC.

Scottish Bird Report

After lunch Alan Wood presented proposals for a new format for the Scottish Bird Report. The SBR, which started in 1968, had been overtaken by events, primarily the appearance of local reports. Alan suggested a large number of changes that would hopefully transform the SBR and reverse it's fortunes. In the main these proposals allowed analysis of the data for the year in question, rather than a simple presentation of bird records. All sources of bird information would be used and data collected on a national basis, such as Wildfowl Counts, would be presented in a Scottish context. This would mean that the SBR would have analyses of national counts of waders, geese and waterfowl; reports on the breeding success of raptors, herons and swans; in-depth analysis of any event that occurred in that year (eg Waxwing or Quail invasions); and studies of migration patterns.

Computers

A discussion of computerisation of bird records followed. Most recorders favoured the arrival of computers, be it only for word-processing, but others remained sceptical about the data processing of records. Andy Webb offered to investigate several systems more fully and report back at the SOC Conference in the autumn.

Grand Slam

Proceedings were interrupted by a shift to the bar to carefully consider the second half of the Calcutta Cup match where Scotland won the Grand Slam. Much heartened the Conference elected Ray Murray as the Recorders' representative on SOC Council and then discussed how the Saturday afternoon at the SOC Annual Conference could be used, now that there was an opportunity to fully discuss matters in March. A date was then set for the 1991 meeting at the same venue; it is hoped that even more Recorders would be able to attend. Wendy Mattingley was thanked for organising the venue.

Ray Murray

Photo Spot

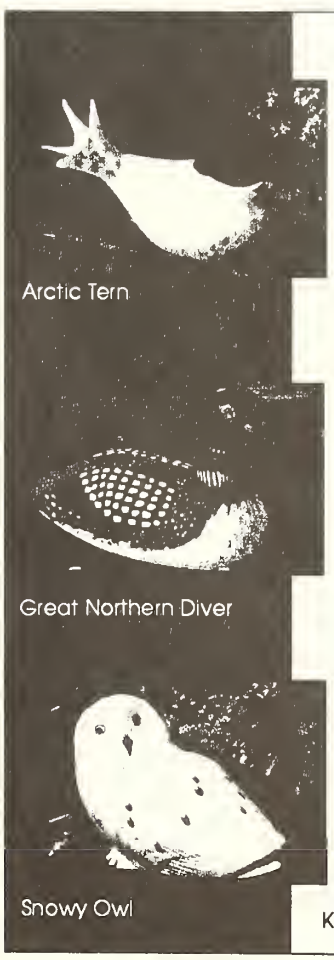
The results of the 1990 photographic competition were:

1st (£20) Redshank feeding, by Edmund Fellowes (see front page)

2nd (£15) Curlew driving sheep from its nest, by David Hassell (facing page)

3rd (£10) Great Spotted Woodpecker on birch tree, by Jimmy Maxwell.

All three prizewinners were colour slides. Judging was by Don and Annie Smith, Chris Mylne and the Editor. As usual the slide entries were shown on Friday evening at the conference and contributed considerably to the evening. Many of the individual contributors to that evening show very nice slides taken in rather exotic places and the competition provides a balance as it is limited to birds photographed in Scotland. It also encourages contributions from people who might not have enough material for an individual talk. Readers may not realise that we started the competition to encourage more black and white pictures for our publications. With a few honourable exceptions, such as Brian Turner's shot of a Great Spotted Woodpecker on this page, we receive few B&W entries and judging them against colour is not easy. Perhaps we are trying to do too many things in one competition. Photographers who have views on how the competition should develop should write to the office so next year's organisers can consider their suggestions.



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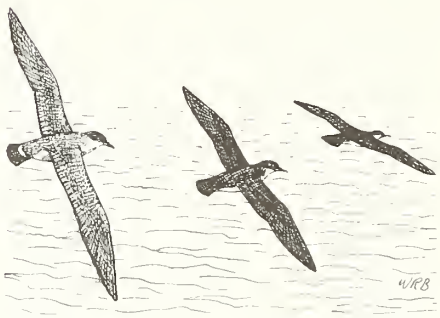
Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to ***Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,*** *via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period July to December is covered here.*

This is my last contribution to Recent Reports and I would like to thank everyone who has submitted records over the last 10 years. *The SOC is extremely grateful to Pete for his work on this feature over the past decade – Eds.*

The autumn weather pattern was a familiar one for recent years with an anticyclone west of the Bay of Biscay forcing the low pressure areas to the north of Britain and resulting in very few days with easterly winds. As a result there were no large falls of migrants, with many, usually common species being very scarce. The eruption of **Common Crossbills** continued to bring hundreds to the Northern Isles, a fierce westerly gale on 19 Sept produced some good seawatching in several areas and there was a good scattering of rare birds.



Shearwaters *Bill Brackenridge*

At Musselburgh **Great Crested Grebes** peaked at 204 and at Gosford 49 **Red-necked Grebes** were recorded. Seawatching produced **Cory's Shearwaters** from Orkney to Dunbar, with a **Great Shearwater** off Foula, a **Balearic Shearwater** off the *Gardyloo* (Lothian's sewage disposal ship), others off Troon and, most unusual of all, a **Little Shearwater** off the Butt of Lewis in August. Gales disrupted **Storm Petrels** in several areas, the highest count being 150 in Scalloway Harbour. **Leach's Petrels** were also involved.

The only rare heron was a **Little Egret** in Orkney. Single **Snow Geese** appeared at Meikle Loch and Longformacus. A **Ruddy Shelduck** on Stronsay will no doubt be dismissed as feral. Other unusual ducks included a **Ring-necked Duck** at Aviemore, several male **King Eiders**, a **Surf Scoter** at Murcar and a **Ruddy Duck** at Hule Moss.

Single **Honey Buzzards** were on Stronsay and North Ronaldsay, and a wing-tagged **Red Kite** from the reintroduction project was seen in East Lothian. A **Red-footed Falcon** visited Shetland and several **Hobbies** were seen.

A **Quail** was still calling in July in Shetland, with 11 in Lothian, but the only migrant **Corncrake** noted was on Fair Isle. There was a **Little Ringed Plover** at Kilmarnock and **American Golden Plovers** on Foula, Shetland and North Ronaldsay. **Little Stints** were fairly scarce. A **Temminck's Stint** was at Virkie, but much more exciting was Britain's second **Long-toed Stint** reported in South Uist. St. Fergus produced 2 **Baird's Sandpipers** together, whilst single **Pectorals** appeared on North Ronaldsay, at Strathbeg and at St. Fergus. **Curlew Sandpipers** were in better supply than last year with 90 on the Ythan the highest count. **Ruff** were widely distributed, the highest total being 117 on Fetlar. The earliest **Jack Snipe** was at Fortrose on 15 August. **Long-billed Dowitchers** appeared on Fair Isle and Arran. A count of 101 **Whimbrel** between Sandhaven and Rosehearty was remarkable and 29 **Greenshank** at Tyninghame on 24 August was a record for Lothian.

Pomarine Skua highest daily total off Hound Point was 31 on 15 August. **Long-tailed Skuas** were scattered with a total of 38 off Hound Point, the highest counts being 10 on 24 and 25 Sept. Unusual **Gulls** included **Mediterranean** at Musselburgh, Doonfoot and Barassie, a scattering of **Little Gulls** including 80 from the *Gardyloo*, single **Sabine's** off Birsay, Peterhead, Dunbar and Gullane, an adult **Bonaparte's** at Gairloch, an adult **Ring-billed** at Aberdeen and a first winter **Yellow-legged Gull** at Doonfoot. **Terns** included a **Caspian** at Doonfoot, **Sandwich** in Shetland and a scattering of **Black Terns** including 28 in Lothian. Early **Little Auks** were noted around 22 – 24 Sept.

An imm. male **Snowy Owl** at Sumburgh on 22 Sept had managed to by-pass Fetlar. **Kingfishers** were at Foyers and Aberlour, a **Bee-eater** at Strathbeg but **Wrynecks** were scarce. The eruption of **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** continued.

Unusual **Pipits** included a **Richard's** and **Olive-backed** in the Northern Isles and single **Pechora Pipits** at Scalloway and on St. Kilda. **Yellow Wagtails** were scarce. Fair Isle produced 2 **Citrine Wagtails** whilst one at Quendale was the first record for Mainland Shetland. A **Dipper** was on Hoy for most of July and early August.

Bluethroats were scarce. A fine **White's Thrush** at Sumburgh only stayed for one day; another was found dead at Eyemouth. A **Swainson's Thrush** appeared on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay had a **Black-throated Thrush.**

Fair Isle had 2 **Lanceolated Warblers** and an **Aquatic Warbler** was at Spiggie but the only **Icterine Warbler** was on Shetland. A **Dartford Warbler** at Barns Ness on 24 August was unusual. Single **Arctic Warblers** were on Fair Isle and St. Kilda and **Greenish Warblers** on Unst and Fair Isle where there was also an early **Dusky Warbler** on 30 Sept. **Flycatchers** were scarce with only 3 **Red-breasted** on Fair Isle and only 10 **Pied** in Shetland.

Only 3 **Red-backed Shrikes** were reported but a **Lesser Grey Shrike** was seen on Whalsay and a **Woodchat Shrike** on Fair Isle, whilst Stronsay produced a **Rose-coloured Starling**. **Two-barred Crossbills** were at several sites in Orkney and Shetland while **Common Crossbills** continued to arrive throughout the period, the highest count being 225 on Fair Isle. Fair Isle also had a **Parrot Crossbill.** As usual **Scarlet Rosefinches** mainly occurred in the Northern Isles though one was at Cruden Bay.

An early **Lapland Bunting** was on North Ronaldsay on 8 Sept but there were rather few of the rarer buntings, with the only **Ortolan** at Cruden Bay, and single **Little Buntings** on Unst and Fair Isle and 2 **Yellow-breasted Buntings** also on Fair Isle.

Stop Press

There were many rarities in October including a ***White's Thrush*** *on Stronsay and Britain's third* ***Ruppell's Warbler*** *on Whalsay.*

Pete Ellis

Reviews

The Kestrel *by Andrew Village; T & A D Poyser 1990; 362pp; many dwgs, photographs and figures; £18.*

A monograph on our commonest bird of prey was long overdue but Andrew Village's book is well worth the wait. The twenty one chapters comprehensively encapsulate the natural history of the Kestrel in yet another excellent single species study from the Poyser stable. Much of the text is based upon Andrew Village's own work both in the grassland and young conifers at Eskdalemuir and in contrasting farmland in Eastern England. The text is detailed yet very readable and thankfully uncluttered with too many figures. Tables are tucked away at the end for reference. The short summaries at the end of each chapter are invaluable in giving the reader a synopsis of each topic. Keith Brockie's black and white drawings are up to his normal high standard and the book is further illustrated with black and white photographs. My only complaint is that the beautiful Kestrel deserves a touch of colour. The book will appeal to a wide audience of ornithologists but is a must for those interested in birds of prey.

Gordon Riddle

The Kestrel; *by Gordon Riddle; Shire 1990; 24pp; figures & colour photographs; £1.95.*

An excellent publication well illustrated with 7 easily understood figures and maps and 16 colour photographs. It gives a very informative readable and detailed account of one of Britain's commonest birds of prey.

Sylvia Laing

Harriers of the British Isles *by Roger Clarke; Shire 1990; 24pp; £1.95.*

This little booklet represents one of the bargains of the year. Crammed within its 24 pages are photographs (including 13 in colour), line drawings, tables, maps and figures, all of the highest quality. It concentrates on the three British breeding harriers, though brief details are given of the other seven species world-wide. Well written and researched by the author, himself a notable harrier enthusiast, this book is a must for all nature lovers and birders (and highly recommended reading for all land-owners and gamekeepers too!).

Brian Etheridge

The Golden Eagle *by John Love & Jeff Watson; Shire 1990; 24pp; £1.95.*

With Scotland holding some 20% of the Golden Eagles in Europe it is surprising that we still await a definitive modern monograph. Until we get this anybody interested in eagles would do well to consult this little book. The majority of the book deals with such topics as distribution, diet and the breeding cycle but there are also sections describing the threats currently facing eagles in Scotland. The main ones changes in land use and persecution. The authors are to be congratulated on producing that rare blend, a readable yet informative text and this, plus some excellent photographs, results in a very useful publication.

Stuart Benn

The Mandarin Duck *by Sir Christopher Lever; Shire 1990; 24pp; 12 col & 2 b/w photos; 6 maps; £1.95.*

Another gem from the Shire Natural History Series, covering the birds' life history, habits and calls, oriental location and history and place in literature and art. There is thorough coverage of several introduction attempts and its eventual spread in Britain as well as where it can now be seen. It is interesting to note that this is yet another species threatened by habitat loss in the Far East.

Fiona Slack

The Hebrides: a natural history *by J M Boyd & I L Boyd; Collins New Naturalist 1990; many illustrations; £30.00 (HB) £12.95 (SB).*

James Morton Boyd, late director of the Nature Conservancy Council in Scotland and his son Ian, a marine biologist, have co-operated to produce a standard work on the Hebrides which is both readable and erudite. This book comes at a timely moment with agricultural patterns changing and seabird populations facing crisis. Misguided EEC policy has brought a proliferation of fences to parts of the machair and remote moorland. More recently forestry plantations have destroyed natural moorland for short term capital gain.

The book is in three parts. Part one deals with the ecosystem of the islands with chapters on the geology, climate and hydrography of the area. The second part contains studies of the islands and species. This includes breeding sea birds, wintering wildfowl and the mammals. The last part deals with islands and the people. The work is completed with a detailed bibliography. There are some excellent maps, diagrams and tables. The coloured plates are beautifully produced but the half-tone illustrations which appear with the text are of variable quality. The book fills a gap and will be indispensable to those who love and visit the islands.

Peter Marriott

Current Topics in Avian Biology. Proc. Int. 100. DO-G Meeting, Bonn 1988; *Elzen van der R., Schuchmann, K.-L & Schmidt-Koenig, K. (eds). Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft, Bonn. 1990. 403pp.*

The Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft (the equivalent of our BOU) held its centennial meeting in Bonn in 1988. The main topics chosen for discussion were zoogeography, systematics and behavioural ecology. In this special publication of the conference proceedings, it was the editors' intention that the 53 papers presented would sketch an adequate profile of current ornithology. Certainly the range of studies covered is very considerable. Half (26) of the papers are in German with English summaries, the remainder are in English. There are two papers concerning studies wholly or partly done in Scotland; Bob Furness on Skuas and Andy Village on the Kestrel. This excellent publication should definitely be purchased by, and referred to in, the main libraries, but it is unlikely to find its way to the birdwatcher's bookshelf.

Nick Picozzi

THE STATUS OF SEABIRDS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Clare Lloyd, Mark Tasker and Kenneth Partridge

This book presents the most up to date information available on these seabird populations, their numbers and distribution, and their changing fortunes in recent years. No-one with an interest in seabirds or conservation can afford to be without this authoritative book.

January 1991, c. 384 pages
ISBN: 0.85661.061.5,
£20.00 (tentative)

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compiled by the Nature Conservancy Council and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The various Red Data Books prepared by the IUCN and ICBP have set the standards for recognising birds close to, or at risk of extinction worldwide. This book, by focussing on vulnerable species living in or visiting Britain, sets out to define the British situation and to clearly establish both the importance of British populations and our own responsibilities for contributing to bird conservation.Illustrated with over 100 drawings by Ian Willis.

December 1990, 300 pages
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SOC Notices

New office bearers

At the AGM in November Frank Hamilton, who has served the Club for two terms as Vice President, took over from Stan da Prato as President. Frank needs no introduction as Scottish Director of RSPB as well as being prominent in the Club for many years; he has served on Management Committee and as Chairman of the Editorial Committee. Ray Murray, Borders Local Recorder and past Chairman of Borders Branch, becomes Vice President, Peter Vandome, an Economics lecturer at Edinburgh University and well known to Lothian members who attend the Winter Discussion Group, takes over from Graham Appleton as Treasurer.

Raffle

Ably organised by Ian McIntosh and the Tayside Branch the raffle this year grossed £1665. After deducting the £100 first prize, printing and other expenses nearly £1400 accrues to the Club. This is an excellent performance. Sincere thanks to the organisers, the people who donated over 20 prizes and to those of you who sold and bought the tickets.

200 Club

There was an excellent response to the President's letter sent out with SBN:19 and over 50 new members joined. Not only has the SOC benefitted but it has enabled extra prizes to be given out from November onwards. There is still room to join the 200 Club and give yourself a chance to win one of the monthly prizes, as well as helping to raise funds for the refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace. Please phone or write to me for details at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. Melrose 2176).**

Winners for the third quarter of 1990 (£20:1st, £10:2nd) were:
July: Dr M.E. Castle, Ayr and I.V. Balfour Paul, Gatehouse-of-Fleet.
August: A.J. Smith, Selkirk and Mrs J. Denney, Glasgow.
September: J.H.B. Munro, Edinburgh and J. Wilson, Glasgow.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Visiting Regent Terrace

All members are welcome to call at the office. It is normally open 9.15 am – 4.30 pm Monday to Friday; it usually stays open at lunch time. Michael Murphy who is part time, can usually be contacted from 10.00 am – 2.00 pm. Bill Harper, our Hon. Librarian, is usually in on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from c10 am. Local holidays, illness or attendance elsewhere eg. travelling to visit a branch can mean staff are not in the office, so it might be worth phoning if you are coming from a distance and want to see a particular person.

Spring conference

A programme and booking form should be enclosed with this mailing. If not contact the office.

Angus recorders

The new county recorder for Angus, in place of Rick Goater, is **Stuart R Green, 41 Laird Street, Dundee.** The assistant recorder is **Martin Scott** of **33 John Street, Arbroath.**

Dumfries meetings

These are now in a new venue: Dumfries High School. The AGM and Members' Night is on 27 March 1991 instead of 3 April.

Perthshire Group

Ron Youngman is interested in setting up an SOC group in Perthshire. In order that he can gauge the degree of likely support would interested members contact him at **Atholl Bank, East Moulin Road, Pitlochry PH16 5HY Tel: 0796 2753.**

Thanks

To Mary Black, Josie Buchanan, Margo Cruft, Bertha Gowan, Hetty Harper, the Hurley family, Graham Appleton, Stewart Ward and the Lothian Branch Committee for packing the last issue of this magazine and to Mark Holling for help with our computer.

Library extension

The departure of the Bookshop has meant that there was unused shelf space in the office. This was an opportunity to relieve the ever growing pressure on space to house the expanding collection of journals held by the Library. Thanks to the professional skills of Bob Smith, it has proved possible to adjust the shelves to fit the wall space in the front basement room adjoining the existing downstairs library. The move is now complete in spite of a navigation error while carrying the book cases outside, which almost resulted in the occupants of 22 Regent Terrace acquiring an unsought addition to their household furniture.

SOC Endowment Fund grants

The completion of the Breeding Atlas project in 1990 means that from April 1991 the SOC, through its Endowment Fund, can once again provide funds in support of amateur fieldwork projects. These projects should relate to 'Scottish' birds. Funding will usually contribute towards travel and accommodation costs but support may be given also towards the purchase of equipment; especially if used by a group and as part of a longer-term project. With regard to the latter these are encouraged through the availability of 3 year grants. Anyone wishing to apply for an SOC Endowment Fund Grant should request an application form from Regent Terrace; the form should be returned by 31st December 1990 for consideration by the Surveys and Research Committee prior to presentation to Council at its meeting in February 1991. A total of £1500 is available for 1991 – the flood of applications is awaited with trepidation!

Allan W. Brown

Colour-ringed Mediterranean Gulls

Details of observations of these birds are welcomed by **Peter L. Meininger, RWS, DGW, PO Box 8039, 4330 EA Middleburg, The Netherlands.**

Scottish Birds

The 1990 edition and the latest index are enclosed with this SBN. Nick Picozzi and his team of Sarah Wanless, Mike Harris and Malcolm Ogilvie have done a first class job on our journal. We are, therefore, very sorry to say that they have decided to make this their last issue. All are professional ornithologists who are under increasing pressure from their many other commitments. As we go to press a new editor has yet to be found. We hope to announce his or her name in the next issue. By the time you read this Council will have approached possible successors but if members have suggestions we shall be interested to hear them.

Scottish Bird Report

The 1989 SBR will come out with the next SBN in March 1991. All concerned regret that it could not appear in the year following that on which it reports. The reason is that the editor can only finish editing when he receives all the records from local recorders and he had still not received some by November.

Local bird reports

It surprises us how few editors take up our offer of free advertising under Small Ads in SBN. Remember to state if the price includes postage. Regent Terrace has copies of some local reports and we hope to publish lists in future; send details to Sylvia Laing before 31 December.

Hen Harrier wing tags

In 1990 the RSPB started a study of the movements and survival of Hen Harriers. This involved tagging nestlings with coloured wing tags. Should anyone see any of these birds please inform; **Hen Harrier project, RSPB, Munlochy, Ross-shire**, noting date, place, colour of the tags (these can be different for each wing) and, if possible, the letters and their colours.

Wing tagged Mergansers

On 11 August this year the Northumbrian Ringing Group caught a large number of moulting male Red-breasted Mergansers off Holy Island thus adding significantly to the small number of birds ringed in Britain (some 120). Fifty of these birds were wing tagged. Any sightings would be gratefully received by **Brian Little, 37 Stella Hall Drive, Blaydon, Tyne and Wear.**

Crossbill invasion

Last summer and autumn saw large influxes of Crossbills into Scotland. These arrivals have coincided with a peak in the cone production cycle of large areas of spruce in Scotland and northern England. Many of the Crossbills have settled and appear to be preparing to breed this winter. Sequential breeding is possible with first broods being fed Sitka Spruce seed and subsequent broods receiving seed from other trees, eg Norway Spruce, as they ripen. Some initial estimates of the number of birds involved are exciting eg 2,000+ in Carron Valley Forest, according to Clyde Branch, while numbers in the Borders are also impressive. This is the winter to go and look for Crossbills in your local forest. Many tetrad atlases still need Crossbill breeding records. It would be useful to distinguish between flocks and singing birds.

David Jardine

Atlas worksheets

Fieldwork for the New Atlas is now complete although there is still a handful of 10 km squares in Scotland which have had no tetrads surveyed. Hopefully these gaps will be plugged next year but in surveying virtually the whole of Scotland in a demanding three years I think we can be more than satisfied at the progress achieved. Much work remains to be done before the fruits of our endeavours ripen into publication. Although my contract with the Club expires soon I shall remain as Scottish Organizer of the New Atlas, thereby maintaining the level of the S.O.C.'s commitment to the project. Fieldworkers and Regional Organizers of the New Atlas should continue therefore to correspond with me at the Club's Headquarters in Edinburgh.

At the time of writing very few 1990 Worksheets have been returned to me. May I appeal once again to all of you who have not yet returned your completed Worksheets to the relevant person to do so without delay? Data from 1988 and 1989 have now been computerised and it is essential that the 1990 data join them in order that full analyses can begin. Delay now will only hinder publication and no-one wants that. So please send in your data now.

Jim Reid

We are grateful to Jim for all his work both in organising the Atlas in Scotland and in plugging gaps in the field. He has generously offered to voluntarily continue as Scottish Organiser. We are delighted to announce that he has taken up a new contract as part of NCC's Upland Birds Team.

Fleas please!

Nest material or searches in nests for individual fleas are requested for Scottish House Martins and Shags. The House Martin supports three species when nesting in association with buildings and four (two of which are different) when in natural sites. One particular species possibly occurring in Shags nests (Ceratophyllus chasteli) may turn up here. It is probably best to scoop out House Martin nest debris at the end of the nesting season and seal (and I mean seal!) in a plastic bag in order to transmit to the museum. Shag nests may be a little more difficult but if a substantial part of the nest cannot be collected there is nothing else to do but search by hand and put suspected fleas or their larvae into a tube. If required we will refund postage but if posting avoid using glass containers. I will sort and transmit to the recorder for verification and undertake to let you know of the results. **Geoff Hancock, Glasgow Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, Tel: 041 357 3929.**

Ornithologisch Station Voorne

In 1990, adults and young of both Lesser Black-backed Gulls Larus fuscus and Avocets were colour-ringed in the Netherlands. Gulls were marked with either a single white or green engraved PVC ring or a combination of two rings (one on each leg). Avocets were marked with a single white engraved PVC ring. Some rings may have become stained as a result of which they are now rusty coloured. In future these projects may be repeated with different colours. Details can be sent to **Schepenenweg 26, 3233 CL Oostvoorne, The Netherlands.**

Small ads

NIKON FIELDSCOPE ED1 FOR SALE, perfect condition £400 o.n.o. **Tel. 0259 219679** (evenings).

LOTHIAN BIRD REPORT 1989

This report is now available at a price of £3.50 from Regent Terrace. It is also available by post at a price of £3.85 from **Oonagh McGarry, Burnfoot Cottage, Symington Mains, Stow, Galashiels TD1 2SU, Tel: 05786 239:**

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY BIRD REPORT 1989

£2 + stamp. **J.E. Howie, 60 Main Street, St. John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW.**

Sales Items

All prices include P&P, except overseas who should add £1.50. Please make cheques, Postal Orders payable to "SOC" at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).

SOC Sweatshirts, Navy (S,M,L)	£10.50
SOC Tie (Navy, Maroon, Green, Brown)	£ 5.95
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SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 31 December for the March number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00	
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00	

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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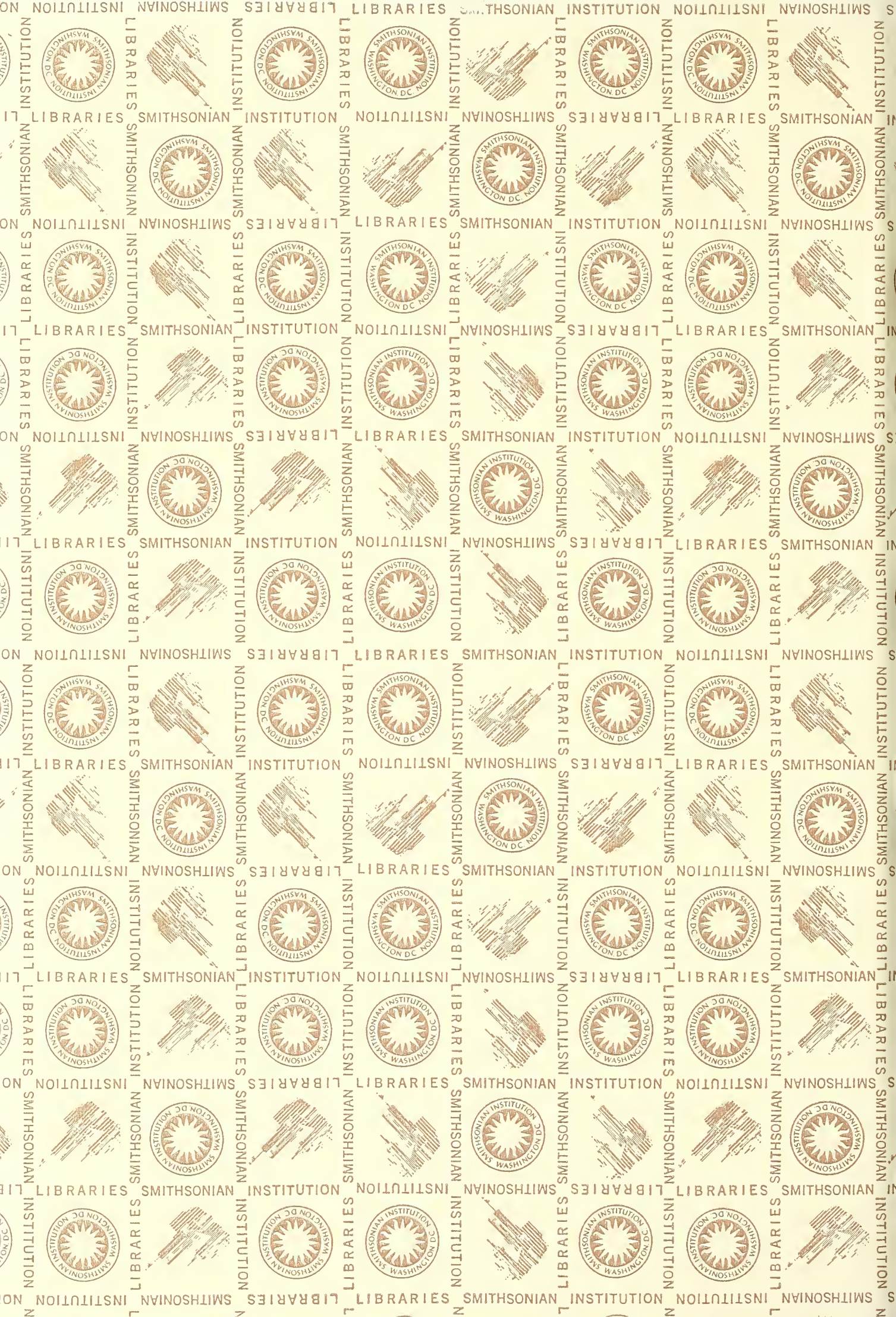
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